THE CALL OF THE UPANISHADS

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INTRODUCTION

The cultural and spiritual heritage of India is both vast as well as rich. But there is nothing sectarian or regional about it. It is so universal in its appeal and so catholic in its approach that it belongs to the whole world. Its setting is no doubt Indian, but its content is such as to cover all aspects of human life, irrespective of geographical units and historical expressions. It is both universal and timeless and, as such, applies to peoples of all ages and of all countries. It may be asked what indeed is the source from where such vast and rich heritage has come into existence—a heritage that has remained fresh and vital even though many centuries have rolled by since it made its first appearance in the dim dawn of time? One can say without the slightest hesitation that the source of this heritage lies in the Great Upanishads. The seers and sages of Ancient India, sitting under a tree, in a far-off forest, revealed fundamental principles of perennial philosophy to students who had gone to them with questions of deep and serious inquiry into the very nature of life itself. The Upanishads contain the essential principles of this Perennial—this Ageless-philosophy. The Upanishads can by no means be described as religious in character—if with religion we associate dogmas and creeds, priest-craft and authority, rewards and punishments. One has only to turn to the Muṇḍaka Upanishad to realise this in ample measure, for, here even the knowledge of the Vedas has been declared as mere lower knowledge. While dissociating itself from all narrow and sectarian expressions of religion, the Upanishadic teaching has laid clear and unmistakable emphasis on the spiritual perspectives of life. The Upanishads have made a clear distinction between knowledge and wisdom. While the seers and sages of those great days of the Upanishads imparted instruction to their pupils in all branches of human knowledge, they indicated to them that mere knowledge would be of no

avail and that they should be inspired by Wisdom. These teachers saw to it that the flame of knowledge was kept alive so that the learning of the pupils would never come to an end—and yet they showed to their pupils that the light of Knowledge was meant only to make "darkness visible". With this awareness of "darkness made visible", through the processes of knowledge, these pupils were inspired to undertake the adventurous journey into the land of the Unknown where alone Wisdom can be discovered. This journey has to be unaided, for no teacher can lead a pupil into the realms of the Unknown. The journey to the Unknown is a flight of the alone to the Alone.

It is true that the entire teaching of the Upanishad centres round a teacher or a guru. But the role of the guru as revealed in the Upanishad is something most revolutionary. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad, we find Yājñavalkya, the most brilliant of the Upanishadic teachers, giving instruction to the great King Janaka. When the latter was pleased with the instruction of the guru, he offered rich gifts to him. But Yājñavalkya *spurned* them aside saying that a teacher cannot accept any gift from the pupil unless he has taught the pupil everything that he knew. This was the Upanishadic tradition of the guru. According to this the role of the guru was to make the pupil stand on his own feet, to make him completely independent so that he did not lean over the guru, making him into a psychological or a spiritual crutch. The role of the guru was to make himself superfluous—such was the great vision of the teacher as revealed in the magnificent teachings of the Upanishads.

The period of the Upanishads must have been a period of free inquiry. Between the teacher and the student there existed a relationship of complete understanding and cordiality. In these esoteric, or mystery schools of the Upanishads there was perfect freedom of thought and expression. As one reads the dialogues between the teacher and the pupil and as one enters into the spirit of the discussions and questions and answers with which the Upani-

shads are replete, one feels as if one is breathing the fresh air of the mountains. The teacher and the pupil had great respect for each other and yet there was an intimate nearness between them. We see here a beautiful combination of Freedom and Discipline, of Reverence and Cordiality.

The subject matter of almost all the Upanishads is Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, and Ātman, the Individual Self. But it is intensely fascinating to see how the same subject is dealt with in each Upanishad in such a manner that the feeling of "sameness" never arises. There is a freshness and a newness in each Upanishad because of which one never feels that it is the same subject of Brahman and Ātman that is being discussed. In the Upanishads one sees the truth of the statement that it is not the conclusion that matters— what matters is the process by which the conclusion is arrived at. The Upanishads are not concerned with the conclusions of thought—they are concerned with the process of thinking. The teachers of the Upanishads have never deviated from the strict rules of logic —but with logical clarity they have shown how logic is limited in its scope. While they have pointed to the realms beyond the mind, they have not even once derided the role of logic and reason. To utilize reason in order to show the inadequacy of reason—this is a difficult undertaking, but the teachers of the Upanishads have displayed a remarkable mastery over this technique of transcending the mind with the help of the mind.

Although the Upanishads have spoken about Brahman and Ātman, they have not dealt with these subjects as if they were remote and far-away from the daily avocations of man. To these abstruse subjects they have brought a touch of intimacy. This is because the teachers of the Upanishads were not dry, uninterested people. They were full of life, showing forth a living interest in men and things. They possessed minds that were perfectly open and therefore ready to respond even to the slightest whisper of life. When one sees the range of subjects with which the ancient Gurukulas were concerned, one realizes

that there was no subject under the sun which was left outside their purview of study and discussion. One sees in these Upanishadic teachers and in their approach to life a brilliance of intellect existing side by side with an intensity of deep emotion. And so we see in these gurukulas an atmosphere where the unrelenting discipline of the mind co-exists with the friendly informality of the heart. Here no artificial effort had to be made to link up sciences with humanities—they were naturally linked up because the whole approach to life was integral.

It may be argued by the modern man that it is too late in the day to talk of the practical efficacy of the Upanishadic teaching in an age of science and technology where we are concerned with hard facts of life and not with such remote and obscure subjects as Brahman and Ātman. He may say, "Of what practical use is this discussion on Brahman and Ātman? Can it help us to resolve the confusions and the perplexities in which the present day civilisation seems to have got itself entangled?" We of this age seem to be thinking that science and technology alone are practical—and that philosophy is something impractical—it may be a good intellectual exercise to be indulged in during moments of leisure as a change, when other amusements have failed, but surely it can have no place in the hard and practical avocations of man's existence, so speaks the modern man of science and technology. But the above description goes ill with the Philosophy of the Upanishads. The Upanishadic philosophy is not dry-as-dust, it is not concerned with metaphysical speculations or with hair-splitting subtleties. It is not with something remote and abstract that the Philosophy of the Upanishads is concerned—its chief interest is in that which is intensely practical. Its concern with the practical aspects of life can be seen in the very theme of Brahman and Ātman which forms the substratum of its whole philosophical approach. Brahman and Ātman are not remote and obscure subjects. In the book entitled *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*—edited by S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore, it is said :

> The real which is at the heart of the universe is reflected in the infinite depths of the self. Brahman—the Ultimate as discovered objectively, is Ātman, the Ultimate as discovered introspectively.

Thus Brahman and Ātman deal with the Objective and Subjective aspects of life. Now the objective and the subjective are so inter-related that the one cannot be understood without understanding the other. Is not physical science itself confronted with this problem of the subjective projecting itself in the objective? As one moves from physical to biological and from biological to psychological sciences one realizes how the subjective is constantly impinging upon the objective so that an objective study of man and the universe is being constantly interfered with due to the ceaseless projection of the subjective. The Upanishadic philosophy took this factor into consideration and evolved an approach which undertook a search into realms both objective as well as subjective. And out of their Wisdom, the great teachers of the Upanishads declared that the nature of Brahman resides in the Ātman—that without knowing the subjective, the knowledge of the objective is incomplete and inadequate. The mystery of the objective world can be unravelled only by comprehending the secret that lies hidden in the subjective.

Many a student of the Upanishads has said that the Upanishads contain only stray and scattered thoughts—some of these thoughts are brilliant and almost dazzling, but there does not seem to be any homogeneous, integral philosophy. Some commentators, too, have expressed this idea and treated the Upanishadic teaching in terms of scattered ideas. These commentators have failed to see any cohesion behind these scattered concepts and ideations of life. In many of the commentaries one sees explanations of different verses and passages in a manner that presumes that there is no connection between them. They have dealt with the Upanishads not as a harmonious whole —but as different pieces strung together without any cohesion or unity between them. To say that the Upanishads do not contain a harmonious philosophy is to miss

the very essense of the Upanishadic approach. It is true that the Upanishads contain enormous jumps from idea to idea, from concept to concept, from experience to experience. But that is how all great geniuses of mankind have presented their sublime discoveries of truth. The Upanishadic teachers were not placing before their pupils cut-and-dried systems of thought. They were not giving to their students a systematised statement of life's philosophy which they could memorize. They were not dictating to them full notes by the use of which they could pass their examinations and go out as full-fledged graduates. The Upanishadic teachers flew from summit to summit—and invited others to scale the heights they had climbed. In the Upanishads we see a record of these sublime flights of the mind and the soul—the flights are stupendous and dazzle a person who witnesses them. These teachers have moved from one idea to another, leaving the intervening steps to be worked out by students themselves. This was the dynamic nature of the Upanishadic teaching. The student had not merely to copy a perfect picture which the teacher may have drawn. The students were not expected to repeat what the teachers had said. They were not asked to remain merely awestruck by the great flights of the teachers. They had to cover, step by step, the ground that separated one flight from the other, one summit of thought from the other. The working out of the intervening steps had to be done by the pupil himself. This required a clear intellect, a bold imagination—but above all else an intuitive insight. The Upanishadic teaching must seem scattered and disjointed to one who looks only at the summits of thought. It is only by working out the intervening steps that one can discover the harmony, the wholeness in the sublime philosophy presented by the Upanishads. Unless one fills up the gaps, separating one summit from the other, one cannot see this wholeness. All seers and sages, prophets and mystics, have spoken the language of the summit—they have flown from height to height. But to many these teachings may seem elusive and impractical. This is so because those who

listen to them do not care to work out the intervening steps. They feel inspired by the vision of the heights, but find it impossible to translate this vision into their daily lives. Very often people who listen to such mystics and seers say: "While we listen, it all seems so simple and practical—but once we are just by ourselves we feel that the vision has eluded us—we have been unable to grasp it." About the Upanishads, too, many have said the same thing. The teachings contained in them have seemed inspiring—but elusive, and so, impractical. Those who say this have not cared to work out the intervening steps. When this is done, the philosophy of the Upanishads does not seem scattered and disjointed—one discovers a wholeness in it—and so, that which had seemed impractical appears intensely practical. Speaking about the intervening steps, Sri Aurobindo in his book *The Foundations of Indian Culture* says something most significant. He tells us:

> (In the Upanishads) the largest metaphysical truths and the subtlest subtleties of psychological experience are taken up into the inspired movement and made at once precise to the seeing mind and loaded with unending suggestion to the discovering spirit. There are separate phrases, single couplets, brief passages which contain, each in itself, the substance of a vast philosophy and yet each is only thrown out as a side, an aspect, a portion of the infinite self-knowledge. All here is packed and pregnant and yet perfectly lucid and luminous brevity and an immesurable completeness. A thought of this kind cannot follow the tardy, careful and diffuse development of the logical intelligence. The passage, the sentence, the couplet, the line, even the halfline, follows the one that precedes, with a certain interval, full of an unexpressed thought, an echoing silence between them, a thought which is carried in the total suggestion and implied in the step itself, but which the mind is left to work out for its own profit. And these intervals of pregnant silence are large, the steps of this thought are like the paces of a Titan, striding from rock to distant rock, across infinite waters. There is a perfect totality, a comprehensive connection of harmonious parts in the structure of each Upanishad—but it is done in the way of a mind that sees masses of truth at a time and stops to bring only the needed word out of a filled silence.

In the Upanishads the flight from idea to idea resembles the paces of a Titan, striding from rock to distant

rock across infinite waters. He who can work out the intervening steps of these Titanic paces can see the harmonious wholeness in the vast philosophy of the Upanishads. He who cannot, must regard the Upanishads as stray and scattered in their philosophic thought. These intervening steps have to be worked out by a keenness of intellect and a boldness of imagination—but these are not enough—for they need not be inspired by an intuitive insight. It has to be remembered that the intervening steps are implied in the Flight itself—they are not away from the paces of the Titan. There is a suggestiveness in the Flight—he who can intuit this suggestiveness can discover the intervening steps, and can say, as Sri Aurobindo has said, that "there is a perfect totality, a comprehensive connection of harmonious parts in the structure of each Upanishad".

The Upanishads contain a large number of inspiring and instructive passages and verses—it has not been possible to include all of them in this book. A certain amount of selection becomes inevitable when one has to deal with such enormous material as is contained in the Upanishads. For the purposes of this book we have taken those verses and passages that have a bearing on the mystical teaching of the Upanishads. It is mysticism which is the very core of the Upanishads—and so in understanding its mysticism one comes to the heart of its sublime and magnificent teaching.

It is significant to note that in spite of dark forebodings about the world and its future there is a silver lining which fills one with hope and cheer regarding the civilization of tomorrow. This silver lining is in the form of a new shift occurring in the religious and philosophical thought of the world. This shift is distinctly towards mysticism. The religious and philosophical thought of the world is seeking a new mystical base from where to act and to inspire the coming generation of man. In all ages, it is mysticism which has been the regenerating force of human civilization. It is this which gives depth to human understanding—and without it man would re-

main a mere plaything in the shallows and the superficialities of life.

Paul Tillich, an outstanding thinker and philosopher of our times says that modern man has lost one dimension of existence—and that is the dimension of Depth. He must regain that lost dimension if he is to know what real happiness is. It is with this dimension of depth that mysticism is primarily concerned. Alan Watts, another great thinker of our times, says:

> Modern man seeks depth by cutting into the surface. But the depth is known only when it reveals itself and ever withdraws from the probing mind.

Depth reveals itself—but only to a mind that has come to a stillness, having known its own limitations. It is with the revelation of depth that the great Upanishadic philosophy is fundamentally concerned. In this age, where science and technology are moving from victory to victory we need a restraining hand of philosophy—for without it science and technology may lead us into a world devoid of meaning and significance. They may lead us into vast extension of achievement—but extension without depth is like possessing a perfect technique of expression without anything to express. It is depth which gives a rich content to fill the form built with skill and labour, drawn from the techniques of modern science. Modern man needs today a meaningful philosophy if the achievements of science are not to lead him to greater and greater destruction—but to sublime and majestic heights of creative living. But from where shall he gather the necessary material for the formation of a right philosophy of life? The answer to that question lies in the Great Upanishads. It is in the Vision of Life given by the Upanishads that man can find the fundamental philosophy of Creative Living—a philosophy that can serve as a Beacon Light even in the midst of surrounding darkness, a philosophy that can lead him from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.

ROHIT MEHTA

I

THE GOLDEN VEIL

The Invocation associated with the *Īśāvāsya Upanishad* is indeed most significant, for, it strikes the key-notes of the whole Upanishadic teaching. It contains the quintessence of the Vedāntic thought in all its purity and simplicity. The Invocation says:

> That is Whole; this is Whole. The Whole comes out of the Whole. Taking the Whole from the Whole, the Whole remains.

Looking superficially, the above statement seems utterly meaningless, for it violates all laws of mathematics. How can the Whole remain Whole when the Whole is taken out of it? It is quite obvious that from a quantitative standpoint the above statement is devoid of meaning. In terms of quantity, there can be no escape from the factors denoting "more" or "less". When something is taken out of something, the latter must register a quantitative loss. It cannot be the same when something is taken out of it. And yet the above Invocation speaks of the Whole remaining Whole when the Whole is taken out of it. What is the meaning of this statement?

The Invocation obviously speaks of the Quality of things. No quantitative process can cause any change in the quality of things. A gold bar may be broken up into tiny fragments—and yet each fragment contains the same quality of goldness as the entire bar. Qualitatively there is no difference between a grain of gold and a bar of gold. Quality is something indivisible. It is to this that the *Bhagavad Gītā* refers when it speaks of *Avibhaktaṃ vibhakteshu*—"Undivided even in the midst of division". The quality of things is independent of size or volume. Though expressed in Time and Space it remains unaffected by them. In order to comprehend the quality

of a piece of music it is not necessary to examine its several parts as expressed in the extensions of time. The quality of a thing exists in its wholeness in the tiniest of its part. The Whole resides even in the part—that indeed is the very nature of quality. The Whole is not to be mistaken for Totality. When parts are put together we arrive at a totality—but the Whole is not made up of the parts. The Whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It is because of this that the quantitative increase or decrease of the parts does not affect the Whole.

The one central theme underlying all the Upanishads is that the Brahman and the Ātman are identical. The nature of the Brahman resides in the Atman. There can be no qualitative difference between the two. If they differ in quality then surely Ātman can never know the Brahman. Since the quality of things is indivisible, the quality of the Brahman must reside everywhere. Reality must be present in its qualitative aspect even in the lowliest of its expressions. Not to see the quality of things in all that is manifested is indeed to be caught in *MĀYĀ* or Illusion. To see quality in the midst of a quantitative variety is to see things as they are—for the quality of a thing is indeed the very nature of that thing.

In the background of this Invocation the first verse of the Īśāvāsya Upanishad assumes a new meaning. This verse which is very famous reads as follows:

> By Īśa (the Lord) enveloped must this all be—
> Whatever moving thing there is in the moving world.
> With this renounced, thou mayest enjoy.
> Covet not the wealth of another.

Here Isa or Lord is not to be understood in any anthropomorphic sense. Isa is really the Supreme. It is Brahman or Reality. The above verse says that Reality pervades everything. The World or *Saṃsāra* is in a state of constant flux; everything is moving away. But the opening verse of this Upanishad says that Reality abides even in this movement. How does Reality abide everywhere even in the moving objects? Is Reality also moving? If it moves, is it not circumscribed by the limita-

tions of Time and Space? If that be the case, how can Reality be everywhere at the same time?

It is but obvious that that which is born in time, dies in time also. It is only the time-less that abides, for it is unaffected by the time-process. Reality must needs be time-less for it is only then that IT can be present at every moment of Time. It is only the Time-less that can be Omnipresent. Time implies succession in which things exist not all-at-once, but one after the other. Omnipresence and succession are contradiction in terms. Manifestation is obviously in time-succession where things happen one after the other. But in the Unmanifest all things exist together. Omnipresence is possible only when things exist simultaneously—and not one after the other. Simultaneous existence and successive existence are what the Time-less and the Time indicate. The simultaneous appears successive due to the refracting process of time. Time is indeed a refracting medium which breaks up the white light of Reality into the spectrum of variegated colours.

When the simultaneous existence of the Time-less is sought to be comprehended through the process of time-succession then the result is a paradox. The Upanishads abound in numerous paradoxes. In fact, the Paradoxes of the Upanishads would be a fascinating subject in the study of philosophy and mysticism. A paradox is the placing of two opposites in juxtaposition. There is no solution to a paradox, a paradox can only be resolved—or, more truly, dissolved. A paradox can be dissolved only when the opposites are seen as existing together—the two, not one after the other, but the two, existing at the same place and at the same time. Human mind cannot conceive of this. The two opposite things existing together would, according to mind's understanding, cancel each other—and therefore the result would be Nothingness. Many a Western scholar has stated that the Upanishads have pointed only to a Negative Way—that they do not give a positive philosophy of life. The Upanishads have spoken the language of paradox. The mind comes to its

highest by grappling with the paradoxes. The mind first defines the opposites which are contained in a paradox. It then sees a conflict between these two clearly defined opposites. Torn and tormented by this conflict it attempts to reconcile them. In this effort it moves along the path of compromise and synthesis. Failing in these endeavours, it gets baffled because it finds that in bringing the opposites nearer, the opposites cancel each other leaving before it a field of nothingness. Unable to reconcile the opposites and afraid to enter the field of nothingness, the mind has nowhere to go. In this state of negativity, the intensely positive experience dawns upon the mind. Thus the Negative Way of the Upanishads is the most positive —for the positive can be born only in a field which is completely negative. The Emptiness itself is indeed the plenum.

The first verse of the Īśâvâsya. Upanishad says that "whatever moving thing there is in the moving world" is enveloped by Īśa or Reality. The question that must arise is—what indeed is the nature of this Reality? If Reality is moving then surely IT cannot exist at the point from where IT has moved. How can Reality then pervade everything? Its all-pervasiveness naturally becomes restricted so that we cannot say that by "Isa is encompassed everything." The Upanishads tell us, including the Īśāvāsya Upanishad, that the Reality or the Brahman is both moving and unmoving—it remains unmoved even in the midst of movement. Once again it is a paradox which the human mind cannot resolve. The Brahman is verily the "Immutable centre of endless mobility." Poet Rabindranath Tagore gives expression to this idea in the following passage in his book entitled *Sadhana* :"

> The progress of our soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realized makes all movements full of meaning and joy. But if we detach its movements from the ultimate idea, if we do not see the Infinite Rest and only see the Infinite Motion, then existence appears to us a monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness.

To see the Infinite Rest and the Infinite Motion simul-

taneously is indeed to comprenend the nature of Reality. The Rest and Motion are not one after the other—but exist all at once. Rest is a condition of Fullness or Wholeness. A thing is in its Fullness in a state of Rest. In Motion this Wholeness is broken up into parts. In movement a thing is partially present—and yet if that movement is alive, and not dead, then it must be impregnated with the quality of the Whole. Rest and Motion are the Being and the Becoming of the Indian Philosophy. If the Becoming which is Motion is detached from the Being which is Rest then such Becoming is a "monstrous evil" rushing towards "an unending aimlessness". Now if the Movement is to be alive due to the presence of the Whole then surely Motion and Rest must exist simultaneously in it. Perfect Rest in the midst of dynamic motion—this verily is the phenomenon of Īśa or Brahman enveloping all—encompassing "whatever moving thing there is in the moving world". He who comprehends Infinite Rest in the midst of Infinite Motion, he verily knows the nature of the Brahman, he sees the whole in the Part, he perceives the Quality of things which retains its Wholeness even when the "Whole is taken away from the Whole".

But the question is: How to perceive the Quality of things, how to comprehend the Whole in the Part, how to see the simultaneous existence of Rest and Motion? This is indicated in the latter part of the opening verse of the Īsāvāsya Upanishad. It says *tena tyaktena bhuñjithā*—"with this renounced, thou mayest enjoy". What does this mean? Is there anything to be renounced in order to comprehend the nature of the Brahman? Very often it is said that by renouncing the world one can perceive the Reality and thereby come to the experience of joy indescribable. *Tena tyaktena* in the above verse is interpreted as renouncing the world. But the question is —why should the world be renounced if it is pervaded by Isa or Brahman? If everything is encompassed by Īśa, how can the necessity of renouncing anything arise? What is sought to be renounced is as much Īśa as that which is sought to be retained. And the Īśa at one place is not

"less" than at any other place, for the Whole does not suffer any diminution even when broken up into tiny bits —"the Whole remains the Whole even when the Whole is taken out of it."

Then what does *tena tyaktena* mean? Its meaning becomes clear when we look at the last portion of the opening verse. It says: "Covet not the wealth of another". The wealth of another obviously means the wealth that is not given to you. And the Īśa Upanishad says—Do not covet something that is not given to you. To *think* of enjoyment in terms of somebody's wealth is entirely meaningless. And therefore the author of the Upanishad says—Enjoy that which is given to you. The Part that is assigned to one can alone be the source of one's joy—to covet the Part of another is to display ignorance of the fact that even the tiniest Part is impregnated with the Whole. The quality of the thing abides as much in the Part that is assigned to one as in any other Part. Why then must one seek the wealth of another? The Part that is assigned to one is as wealthy as the Part assigned to another. *Tyaktena* obviously means that which is assigned, given, set apart or left for oneself. An acceptance of what is assigned or given to one is indeed the surest basis of true enjoyment. To crave for what is not given is verily the path of frustration and sorrow. In the Third Discourse of the Bhagavad Gītā there is a verse which says:

> The righteous who eat the remains of sacrifice are freed from all sins, but the impious who prepare food for their own sake—verily they eat sin.

To eat the remains of sacrifice—this indeed is what is indicated in the phrase *tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā* —enjoy that which is assigned to you, that which has been set apart for you. Why does one covet another's wealth? It is because one has not discovered one's own treasures. This discovery is possible only when one sees Infinite Rest in Infinite Motion—when Motion is detached from Rest—then such movement becomes monstrous evil, resulting in the frustrations of becoming.

To accept what is given is not a gospel of passivity. It is indeed the basis for true joy and a starting point for right action. In Acceptance one discovers the Infinite Rest. When Infinite Motion—which is the process of Becoming—is rooted in Infinite Rest then is all movement full of meaning and joy. In Infinite Rest one discovers the Quality of one's own Being—the Quality of the Ātman which is identical with the Quality of the Brahman.

The acceptance of that which has been assigned to one is not a gospel of postponement either. Many a time a person adopts an attitude whereby he says that he must accept his fate in the hope that the future will bring joyous tidings. This is no acceptance at all—it is submission—and, that, too, with an inner resentment. To accept what is given—what is set apart for oneself—is to engage in Right Perception. Very often man refuses to receive what is given because he does not see what it is. When one perceives rightly then one sees in the thing given the quality of Truth and Beauty and Joy—the quality of Brahman Itself. To accept what is given is to transform the thing into a window from which to look at the beauty of life itself. The experience of joy comes in the very perception itself. And so the action that emanates from that perception is rooted in joy. That is why the opening verse of the Īśa Upanishad says—Enjoy what is assigned to you—it does not say—Endure what is given to you. To accept what is given is to perceive the Quality of one's own Being. The process of Becoming which emerges out of this perception is naturally free from the elements of sorrow and frustration. And so the second verse of this Upanishad says:

> Working thus, a man may wish for a life of a hundred years.
> In this way—not otherwise thy actions shall not bind thee.

When actions arise from the source of joy arising out of right perception, man can easily expect to live upto a hundred years. The possibility of living upto hundred years indicates the utter absence of worry and anxiety. It is the frustrations of the mind that make a man look

older than he is. It is worry that depletes his energies, leading him to premature death or old age. When man accepts what is given to him, perceiving in it the quality of his own Being, then he is freed from all factors that cause frustrations. In the perception of the Quality of his own Being, he discovers his own *Svadharma*—his own true Vocation. And does man ever get frustrated when he is engaged in his own Vocation? To covet the wealth of another is to forget one's own Vocation and get involved in the profession of another. This truly is *Paradharma*. The above verse of the Upanishad says that actions can never bind a man so long as they arise from the Ground of Acceptance. It is not Action but Reaction that binds a man—for reactions are a chain-phenomenon. They get entangled in an associative process where one reaction calls out another in a never-ending chain. Reactions arise from the background of covetousness—the desire to have what another has. When a man's vision is confused it is then that he covets another's wealth. A man who has discovered the Quality of his own Being is a Spiritual Aristocrat, acting on his own with grace and dignity. To discover the Quality of things is to accept what is given—for Quality resides everywhere, even in the tiniest and the lowliest. He who makes this acceptance as the basis of action is freed from all bondage here and now. Such a man can live as long as he likes for he has brought under control the very movement of Time itself. It is not the Mind, but the Spirit that moves him. And the Spirit verily is Timeless—Eternal and Unborn.

The Īśa Upanishad says—"Whoever neglects the Spirit goes to the regions of utter darkness." What indeed is meant by the neglect of the Spirit? The Spirit is obviously neglected when the process of Becoming loses the vital and living touch of the Being—where Quantitative riches are accumulated with a complete forgetting of the Quality of things. When this happens the process of Becoming naturally leads one to regions of utter darkness.

If, however, it is said that in Acceptance of what is given one discovers the Spirit—the Quality of Things—

space. It is only the *Paribhū* that knows the arrival of the *Svayambha* :

But what is meant by creating Space in consciousness? And how is this to be done? The space in consciousness is indeed the state of Love. And creation is possible only in a state of Love. But a state of Love is a condition of virginity of utter emptiness. Now a consciousness which is subject to modifications has no space in it. The modifications arise because of the play of the opposites. But how can there be Love where opposite or duality exist? And so *Paribhū* is a condition where the opposites have dropped away because of which there is clear, open space—space not broken up by objects, but space without any object. The pervading, the encompassing, is possible only in such space. But how can one come to this experience of immensity of space? Be it remembered that the virgin soil is not dead—it is tremendously alive, and yet possessing nothing. In the above verse while *Paribhū* indicates the Emptiness of the soil—the other two decriptions suggest to us the aliveness of the soil. The soil must be made alive, for without this, its emptiness is utterly barren. And how can the barren soil give birth to something that is Original and Unique? And so the consciousness, before it comes to the Immensity of Space, must be made alive. Alive and yet empty it is only such a consciousness that can know the Original and Unique—it alone can commune with Brahman, the *Svayambha*

It needs to be remembered that the emptiness of space cannot be created. The space that is created is always a space with Object—the Space without an object comes into existence—it cannot be brought into existence. The question is—how does it come into existence? It is most interesting to observe that the soil that is alive is always empty, ready for new creation. What can a tired and exhausted soil produce? Nothing except weeds. But a soil that is living always produces something fresh and vital. Such is indeed the case with the soil of human consciousness. It must be kept alive, and this living qua-

lity itself will create immensity of space, a virginity of soil, in which the Original and the Unique can take birth. The question is—how is the human consciousness to be kept alive?

The verse of the Īśa Upanishad says that the Spirit or the Brahman is *Kavi* and *Manishi*—the seer and the thinker. We have seen that Brahman being *Svayambha* is Original and Unique. And therefore in communing with the Unique man indeed comes to a communion with the Brahman. But such communion is possible only when there is immensity of space in human consciousness. Now it is only the consciousness that is alive, that can show forth this immensity of space. And the consciousness that is alive contains the factors indicated by *Kavi* and *Manishi* . The *Kavi* is indeed a Seer—but not a seer in the sense of just an observer. The *Kavi* sees with a sensitivity of perception—he sees with his entire being—there is a passion—an intensity of emotion in his perception. The *Kavi* sees many things which an ordinary observer is not able to do. The consciousness of the *Kavi* is one that is surcharged with emotion—it is one which vibrates and pulsates with emotion. Thus intensity of emotion—a quality of passion—is one of the essential factors that makes human consciousness alive. The *Kavi* is a Seer but not a disinterested seer—he is a seer whose very observation is surcharged with tremendous vitality born of an intensity of emotion. And yet the Spirit is also a Manīshī—a thinker with extraordinary brilliance and clarity. A clarity which can perceive the play of the opposite and in this very play see the cancellation of the opposites and therefore come to a perfect negativity of consciousness. An intellectual clarity must needs come to the point of perfect negativity. But this negativity is not to be mistaken for passivity. The negativity, is born out of the co-existence of an intensity of emotion and a clarity of thinking. It is true that the clarity of thinking brings the mind to an experience of utter negation—but this negation is vibrant with an intensity of emotion. There is the vitality of a Seer and the clarity

The last phrase in the above verse seems rather strange and mystifying. It says that the Spirit "has appropriately distributed objects through the eternal years". What does this mean? Obviously here the reference is to the Transcendent expressing Itself in the Immanent. And the verse says that in this process the Spirit has appropriately distributed objects. This indicates that each object is occupying its rightful place—in other words, each object is occupying its unique position in the entire sphere of immanence. Each object is so appropriately distributed that it can act with its own distinct and unique quality. It is needless to say that the Transcendent is the Whole, while the Immanent is made up of the Parts. When the Whole distributes the Parts, each Part occupies its rightful, appropriate place. The opening verse of the Īśa Upanishad says *tena tyaktena bhuñjithā* —it obviously means Enjoy the appropriate place that is given to you because it represents the distinct and unique quality of that unit of life. When the unit of life acts from its own appropriate place then there is no sorrow or frustration—in fact, that unit of life can hope to live a hundred years with no fear of getting involved in the bondage of action.

But we do not enjoy the appropriate place that is given to us—we covet the wealth of another. Why? This is because we do not see the appropriateness of the place that is assigned to us—we are not aware of the Quality of our Being. It is obvious that this appropriateness cannot be discovered by analysing and dissecting the Part—it can be discovered only when there is the Vision of the Whole. The Spirit is the Whole and so we must look at the Part with the eyes of the Spirit. It is to the eyes of the Spirit that the Parts seem occupying the appropriate places. It is only when we are able to see thus that it will be possible for us to enjoy that which is assigned to us without coveting the wealth of another. This is true *Aparigraha* or non-possession. But the question is: How to perceive with the eyes of the Spirit?

In the eighth verse of the Īśa Upanishad, quoted above, there is an indication as to how one can see with the eyes

of the spirit. Such seeing is obviously not a conceptual approach. It is not arrived at by thinking or imagining. It is not a question of forming an idea as to how the Spirit looks at Its own creation. To know how to perceive with the eyes of the Spirit is to come to a communion with the Spirit. It is only in an act of communion that one can know how the Spirit looks at its own creation. How is one to come to this communion?

The eighth verse of the Iśa Upanishad says that the Spirit is *Svayambhū* — self-created. This shows that the Spirit is not the product of the opposites—but comes into existence by Itself. IT is thus Original—and not the resultant product of opposing forces. And so the Spirit or the Brahman can be known only in a state of originality. It cannot be found in the field of the opposites but only in a condition of originality. The original is Unique or Incomparable. The Brahman is often described as One without a Second. And so only in comprehending the unique and the incomparable that one comes to the experience of the Brahman. The Brahman resides in his Creation but only as the Unique, the Incomparable, the Original. But how can one see the Unique and the Original? It is here that the description of the Spirit or the Brahman given in the above verse proves of inestimable value. The verse describes the Spirit as *Kavi* or *Seer*, as *Manishi* or Thinker and as *Paribhū* or Pervader. In this description we are given an indication as to how one can come to the experience of the Svayambhū or the Original—how one can come to the communion with the Unique and the Incomparable.

The above verse says that the Spirit is *Paribhū* —meaning the Pervader or the Encompasser. Now what is the pre-condition for pervading or encompassing? Surely it is the Immensity of Space. The Original can be born only in a soil that is virgin. It is only in immense emptiness that the unique and the incomparable can be born. It is only in the consciousness which has infinite space that there can take place the birth of the Brahman, the *Svayambhū*, the Original. The unique and the original cannot be experienced by a consciousness that has no

then the question is what is Acceptance—how does one do it—and what is Spirit or the Quality of Things?

The Fourth and the Fifth verses of the Īśa Upanishad give a very vivid description of the Spirit, the neglect of which leads a man to regions of utter darkness. These verses say:

> The Spirit, without moving, is swifter than the Mind; the senses cannot reach IT; IT is ever beyond them. Standing still IT overtakes those who run. IT moves. IT moves not,
> IT is far and IT is near,
> IT is within all this,
> AND IT is outside of all this.

Here we come across the great paradoxes of the Upanishads. How can the Spirit be both moving and unmoving? If It stands still how can It overtake those who run? How can It be both far and near? If we add up all the above attributes of the Spirit, the result would be Nothing. With the opposites each cancelling the other, the Spirit indeed appears as Nothing and so the Quality verily is Nothing. And is this not true? We have stated above that the Quality is indivisible. Surely it is only Nothing that is indivisible—for something can be divided. Some*thing* is divisible and so must suffer diminution when anything is taken out of it. Something undergoes the fluctuations of "more" and "less"—but how can there be any fluctuation in Nothing? Nothing remains Nothing under all circumstances. And yet without the presence of Nothing, the entire manifestation must seem dead and devoid of purpose. Without this Nothing, the whole existence must appear a "monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness." The Upanishads are verily concerned with the Mystery of Nothing. Does the Īśāvāsya Upanishad take us nearer to the unravelling of this Great Mystery?

Speaking about the Spirit, the Īśa Upanishad says that IT is incorporeal, IT is invulnerable, and IT is incorruptible. Incorporeal it certainly is, for IT is unborn and unmanifest.

Incorporeal IT must be for while IT contains all forms

—no form can contain IT—and so IT remains Formless in its true and intrinsic nature. While immanent in forms, IT remains supremely transcendent. But why does the Isa Upanishad describe IT as invulnerable? The invulnerable, surely, is something that cannot be assailed—something that defies all attacks, something that can never be wounded. Now what is unassailable? In order to assail something it is necessary to grasp it, to hold it. A thing can be assailed only when it is clearly defined—in other words, when it exists in Time and Space. Unless a thing is confined in a frame—whether a material or a mental frame—it eludes one's grasp. The Spirit or Reality is for ever elusive—for it is intangible, outside the grasp both of the senses and the mind. And the Intangible is always invulnerable, for it can never be possessed. IT is invulnerable not because IT is surrounded by strong walls of defence. The Intangible is not invisible, hidden behind subtle veils of manifestation. The Intangible is exposed and defenceless—and yet IT is invulnerable. The Intangible is fragile and yet strong—Its strength comes from the fact that It can never be possessed. And it is this which renders IT incorruptible. Needless to say, it is possession that corrupts—it corrupts both the possessor and that which is possessed. The possessor is corrupted because he grows insensitive by the very act of possession—but that which is possessed also becomes corrupt because possession is possible only by isolating a thing from its living context. And that which is torn away from its living context is bound to get corrupted for it is dead and therefore gets decomposed. Thus Reality or Brahman, or, the Quality of things, is for ever Intangible. Even when the Form is divided, it remains Whole. The Intangible is the intimation of the Formless in Form, of the Unmanifest in the Manifest, of the Transcendent in the Immanent. The eighth verse of the Iśa Upanishad says:

> The Spirit is incorporeal and invulnerable, pure and untouched by evil. It is wise, intelligent, encompassing and self-existent. It has appropriately distributed objects through the eternal years.

of a Manīshī which render human consciousness alive and yet empty. The emptiness of such a consciousness is not to be mistaken for barrenness. Thus intensity of emotion, clarity of thinking and immensity of space constitute a state of human consciousness in which a communion with the Original, the Unique, the Incomparable is possible. The state of consciousness as indicated by the *Kavi*, the *Manishi* and the *Paribhū* is indeed that state where the *Svayambhū* is perceived. And to perceive the *Svayambhū* —the Unique and the Original—is to look at the world of Immanence with the eyes of the Spirit. And when this is done one understands the appropriateness of all things, one discovers the quality of Things, and in this discovery alone is it possible for one to come to the experience of *tena tyaktena bhuñjithā* .

The crux of the problem as posed by the Īśa Upanishad is to have Clarity in the midst of Intensity. One can have a clarity of thinking but such clarity is often dry-as-dust, showing forth disinterested impersonality. Similarly one can have an intensity of emotion but once again this is very often associated with a cloudy vision and a confused thinking. To have clarity and intensity at the same time—not one after the other—this indeed constitutes a state where human consciousness is alive and yet empty. A man must be a *Kavi* and a *Manishi*. at the same time, for thus alone his consciousness will have that virginity in which new and original creation is possible. It is only the Unique that can know the Unique—for it is only the Alone that can commune with the Alone. The Īśa Upanishad puts this same question in yet another form in the subsequent verses. It says:

> Into deep darkness fall those who follow action. Into deeper darkness fall those who follow knowledge.

In the normal experience of man Action and Knowledge are one after the other—not simultaneously. There is always a gap between the two. It is this gap which brings darkness and desolation in the life of the individual. Action which is not inspired by knowledge is mere activity. It is a mere *Upāsanā*—a meaningless practice. Similarly

knowledge which is bereft of the vitalizing touch of action is dry-as-dust. The above verse says that mere activity leads a person to darkness, but mere ideation leads him to even greater darkness. An ideational knowledge as also repetitive activity are both meaningless. They lead a person to the realm of false values. It is the gap between the two which renders both of them ineffective. In the so-called spiritual life there is always an endeavour to bridge the gulf between Belief and Behaviour. But such endeavour exhausts the individual because the bridge is never completed and can never be completed. It has to be remembered that when a Belief is sought to be translated into Behaviour, the attempt is to construct a bridge between two points, one of which is fixed and the other is constantly moving. A Belief constitutes a fixed point but Behaviour which is related to life is subjected to constant flux—because life itself is in a state of flux. How can such a bridge be ever constructed? A Belief represents ideational knowledge; and Behaviour tends to become a repetitive activity. Neither of them can lead man to illumination. It is to this baffling problem that the Īśa Upanishad refers when it speaks of action leading to deep darkness and knowledge leading even to deeper darkness. What then is to be done? The Īśa Upanishad says:

> He who knows both knowledge and action, with action overcomes death and with knowledge reaches immortality.

Here the obvious reference is to the simultaneous existence of Knowledge and Action so that there is no question of bridging a gulf. In our normal experience we regard action as following thought. There is first the thought-pattern and then slowly, by toil and effort, we seek to create a behaviour-pattern in terms of that thought. We regard thought as always preceding action. But can this process be reversed? If it could be, then there would be action first and thought would be used only as a means to describe the action. The description by thought would emerge very naturally. When a person discovers something, out of that experience comes an expression which is natural and simultaneous. There is no gap bet-

II

THE SILENT NIGHT

The Upanishads represent an inquiry—a deep inquiry—by the human mind into the fundamental problems of existence. They have followed the method of discourse and discussion in which the Teacher and the student have together explored the subjects of inquiry. Nowhere in the Upanishads has the Teacher spoken with an air of finality—he has encouraged his students to ask as many questions as possible, and when the answers have not been completely satisfactory, the students have not refrained from putting further questions so as to clarify the points of inquiry. Unless one understands this close relationship of the Teacher and the student, one may fail to enter into the spirit of the Upanishadic teaching. A state of inquiry constitutes a healthy condition of the human mind. But here one must make a distinction between inquiry and *curiosity*. Needless to say, curiosity arises from a shallow and a superficial mind. But inquiry, on the other hand, emerges from the depths of human consciousness. A deep inquiry is fundamentally concerned with three questions—the *How*, the *Why* and the *What*. All scientific inquiry, whether covering the physical or the occult sciences, relates itself to the question: *How*. Science is all the time concerned about finding out *how* things behave. Philosophy has its inquiry turned in a different direction—for it is interested to know *Why* things behave in a particular manner. But Mysticism, or religious experience is not satisfied with merely the *How* and the *Why*—it wants to find out *What* it is that is behind all patterns and motivations of behaviour. In the Kena Upanishad the main question under discussion is—What is it that impels and motivates the particular modes and patterns of action?

Who sends the mind to wander afar! Who first drives life to

> start on its journey. Who impels us to utter these words. Who is the Spirit behind the eye and the ear?

It is very significant to note that the very first question deals with the inquiry as to the impelling power of the mind due to which it travels far and near. The questioner is not concerned with *How* and *Why*—he wants to know *What* is it that impels the eye to see and the ear to hear—*What* is it that impels the speech to speak and the mind to think? The answer which the Teacher gives is illuminating. About the impelling force he says:

> It is the Ear of the ear, the Eye of the eye, the Word of the words, the Mind of the mind, and the Life of the life.

The above statement seems rather strange. What does ear of the ear, eye of the eye and mind of the mind mean? The Teacher here is dealing with the question of the impelling force and he says that it is the ear of the ear which impels the ear to listen, it is the eye of the eye which impels the eye to see, and it is the mind of the mind which impels the mind to think. Obviously there is something more than merely the ear, the eye, the speech or the mind which impels these organs to engage in their respective functions. Evidently the Teacher seems to indicate that it is the Quality of hearing that impels the ear to hear, it is the Quality of seeing which impels the eye to perceive, it is the Quality of Speech that impels the speech to articulate, it is the Quality of thinking which impels the mind to think. Physical science has been trying to unravel the mystery of evolution by following a principle which it has propounded—namely: Organ precedes Function. But the Scientific understanding of evolution through the application of this principle has brought it into blind alleys. The Upanishad propounds a startling principle, given in the above verse, which says that it is Function which precedes Organ. It is the function which impels the organ. The function can and does bring into existence a variety of organs. The whole basis of structural evolution lies in the impelling power of the function. The function seeks to create finer and finer instruments of expression and it is this which lies at the root of

is no time-lag between the two. In the negation of continuity death is overcome and in entering the realm of discontinuity, Immortality is known or realized. Here we are not referring to a belief in immortality. A belief is a concept—and a concept functions within the confines of continuity. And therefore a concept of immortality indicates a state of ceaseless continuity. Immortality is not an endless continuity. A continuity is a time-process—even if it is endless, it is still a time-process. Now a time has a beginning and therefore an end. And so immortality when it is a product of thought is subject to the time-process. Such an immortality has an end—even though the end may be far away in terms of time. But an immortality that has an end is no immortality at all. To talk of an end with reference to immortality is to indulge in a contradiction. But such contradiction is inevitable so long as we think of immortality as an endless continuity. Immortality cannot be known by conceptual thinking. It is only when all concepts end that immortality can be known. And the ending of all concepts is death—the cessation of the immanent or the manifest. Immortality resides in the realm of Transcendence, the realm of the Unmanifest. Immortality is not of time—it is the experience of time-less-ness. The overcoming of death is in immanence, for it comes when the manifest is negated—but the knowledge of immortality is in transcendence, for, it comes when man steps out of time and enters the region of the Timeless. The experience of death and the knowledge of Immortality are simultaneous—for it is in death and there alone that man can know Immortality. The Īśa Upanishad says: let there be a complete negation of the manifest—the putting away of the veils of immanence—for when the veils of the manifest are rent asunder then there stands before man the Spirit in all Its glory.

The Īśa Upanishad almost concludes with that great and inspiring idea, for it says in its fifteenth verse:

> With a golden vessel
> The face of the Real is covered over,

That do thou, O Pūshan, uncover
That I, devoted to truth, may behold.

According to the above verse, the spiritual experience is a process of uncovering. Truth or Reality has been covered over. There are veils after veils of manifestation which have covered the Face of Truth. Brahman or Reality is in front of us—but we cannot see IT because a screen has been cast over IT. In the removing of the veil—which is a negative process—there comes the intensely—positive experience of directly perceiving the Face of Brahman. And strangely enough Reality is covered over with a golden veil. The veil being golden so fascinates and attracts us that we are unwilling to remove the veil. But who has put this golden veil over the Face of Truth? The veil is indeed cast by thought—and the thought has woven it out of the beautiful material supplied to it by its own accumulated background. Thought has naturally taken the finest material available to it—it has studded the veil with gold and silver, with all the jewels that it could find in its own treasure-house. But the veil of thought must needs be of the material drawn from the realm of continuity. It is this screen of continuity cast by thought which hides the face of the Real which for ever is Timeless and therefore outside the stream of mind's continuity. When the veil of mind's projections is removed then there stands in all its majesty the Supreme Spirit.

When the Spirit or the Brahman is seen, does not every object of the manifested world shine with a new light? When the Light of Reality shines then the Quality of each object is revealed. And when this happens man cries out with great jubilation and says to himself—*tena tyaktena bhuñjithā, mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam.* Enjoy what is given unto you, do not covet the wealth of another.

ween experience and expression while there is always a gap between belief and behaviour. A bridge can never be constructed between Thought and Action—but between Action and Thought, no bridge is necessary at all. If action could precede thought then the whole problem of frustrating struggle between Precept and Practice could be eliminated. It is to this that the above verse of the Īśa Upanishad refers—for it says—"with action he overcomes death and with knowledge reaches immortality". It is a fact that man is afraid of death—and he wants to conquer death by acquiring a knowledge of immorality. An acquired knowledge is nothing but belief. With belief in immortality we wish to overcome death. But the attempt fails—the fear of death remains inspite of this belief. Immortality is an ideational concept—we are unable to translate it into that behaviour which is free from the fear of death. The gap for ever remains unbridged. Where thought precedes action there is bound to be a state of inner conflict—the conflict between a belief in immortality and the fear of death. But the Īśa Upanishad says—reverse this process so that action comes first and thought follows thereafter. It says—first DIE and then in *that* experience of death will come the knowledge of Immortality. The knowledge of Immortality is born naturally and spontaneously—it comes in the very wake of the experience of death.

It may be noted that precedence of Action over Thought is not an advocacy for thoughtless action. A thoughtless action is an impulsive action. It is an action born out of habit or instinct. It is obviously an action born out of inertia. But precedence of Action over Thought is a state in which action takes place when thought is not even born. The above verse of the Īśa Upanishad speaks of "overcoming death" by Action. It is needless to say that Death demands a total action for it does not leave anything behind. Such totality of action is possible only when action precedes thought. Where thought intervenes action is bound to be incomplete. Thought arises from the accumulated background of the

mind. Its existence therefore depends upon keeping that background intact. A breaking up of this background would mean the end of thought itself. And so the intervention of thought in any action is for keeping up the continuity of the background. Thus thought restricts action and keeps it within the confines of continuity. How can an action functioning within the confines of continuity overcome death which is an experience of discontinuity? Death is a phenomenon of discontinuity. To overcome death therefore requires an action which is free from the restrictive influences of continuity. Such action is possible only when there is no intervention of thought. Where action precedes thought—there alone the experience of death comes. And from such experience emerges the realisation of immortality. The experience of death and the realisation of immortality are not separated by a time-leg—they are instantaneous. The action of overcoming death and the knowledge of immortality are simultaneous—not one after the other. This is the joint phenomena of the *Kavi* and the *Manishi* .. And out of such joint phenomena comes *Paribhū* —the virgin soil in which the Unique or the Original is born.

The Īśa Upanishad explains this idea further when it says:

> Immanence and Transcendence—
> He who this pair conjointly knows,
> With immanence overcomes death
> With transcendence reaches the immortal.

To know Immanence and Transcendence as a joint phenomena—that is what the Īśa Upanishad says. To know continuity and discontinuity simultaneously—this is what the above verse indicates. Continuity is represented by Immanence or the Manifest. Death is the cessation of the Manifest. Where the Manifest is totally negated—there comes the experience of death and so through the negation of the manifest man overcomes death. But the moment when the manifest is negated is also the moment when transcendence is experienced. It is like the opening of the window and the rushing in of the sunlight. There

the evolution of forms which science studies so diligently. Where does this function reside? It expresses through the organ and yet is beyond the organ. No scientist can find the Quality of hearing by dissecting the ear. The same is the case with regard to other organs. In the above verse the ear of the ear and the eye of the eye obviously mean the Quality of hearing and the Quality of seeing. Once again speech is not just the collection of words. If it were merely a collection of words—the speech would never become intelligible. There is a Quality which imparts a "livingness" to words—just as there is a Quality which gives to thoughts that factor which makes them alive. The above verse says that this impelling force is the Life of life. There is a difference between life and mere existence. That which transforms existence into life is the Quality of living. It is the presence of this Quality which makes everything alive. It is quite obvious that a study of grammar cannot supply meanings to be expressed in words. The study of grammar may enable a person to dissect and analyse a poem in terms of various grammatical terms—but a poem is not just grammar. The beauty of a poem lies in the living quality that has been imparted to words. This is the Quality of a poem. Thus it is the Quality of Things which constitutes the impelling force behind all that is manifested. The Upanishad describes this Quality as the Spirit. But the question is—how can this Spirit or the Quality of Things be known? The third verse of the Kena Upanishad says:

> There the eye goes not, nor words, nor mind. We know not, we cannot understand,—how can we then explain What IT is?

The Quality of hearing, seeing or thinking cannot be explained in terms of the ear, the eye and the mind, for the Quality is not to be found by dissecting the organ. The quality is not arrived at by separating the parts and examining each part minutely. While the parts become alive by the touch of the Quality, the latter cannot be grasped by the analysis of the former.

The Teacher of the Kena Upanishad says that this Spirit or the Quality is above the known and is also above

the Unknown. The Teacher says that the Spirit is above the known. That which is known is the conceptual product of the mind. That which is known represents the thought of the mind. And a thought is the crystallization of thinking. Let us not forget that it is thinking which has a flowing and a living quality. A thought remains isolated from the living quality of thinking. And so while it is a structure—may be a beautiful structure—it has no quality of life in it. A thought obviously is something lifeless—how can the Spirit—the *Quality of things* —be ever known by something that is devoid of life? The Spirit cannot be known by thought. The known and the Unknown are only two aspects of thought. The mind which declares something as "Unknown" does so only through the instrument of thought. The known and the unknown are only the labels of thought. And so the Teacher of the Kena Upanishad says that the Spirit cannot be comprehended by thought—it matters not whether thought calls IT the known or the unknown. Thought cannot describe IT either in positive or non-positive terms. The Known and the Unknown are only the opposites of thought. The Spirit cannot be contained by the opposites, so long as mind recognises something as Unknown, so long the unknown is only another form of the known. Known and unknown are mere verbalizations of the mind. The Teacher of the Kena Upanishad says that the human consciousness, by its own effort, cannot know the Spirit. This limitation of human consciousness has been expresed most beautifully in the following verses of the Upanishad:

> What cannot be spoken with words, but whereby words are spoken, know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit—and not what people here adore.
>
> What cannot be thought with the mind, but whereby the mind can think, know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit—and not what people here adore.
>
> What cannot be seen with the eye, but whereby the eye can see, know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit—and not what people here adore.
>
> What cannot be heard with the ear, but whereby the ear can hear, know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit—and not what people here adore.

The above verses tell us that while the Spirit contains the ear, the eye, the speech and the mind—these latter cannot contain the Spirit. While the Spirit is immanent in the organ, IT is at the same time transcendent. If the Spirit were not immanent in the organ, the organ would be dead—it would cease to function. And yet the Spirit is transcendent—It is not exhausted by the organ—nay, it does not even suffer any diminution by being immanent in the organ!

The Sun sends out its millions of rays to illumine the dark corners of the entire Solar system—and yet it does not leave its place, nor does it become less by virtue of its sending out these rays. All things in the Solar system are sustained because of the immanence of the Sun—they would be dead if the Sun were to withdraw its immanence. And yet how can the blade of grass which exists because of the sun, know what the nature of that Sun is? Although by sun the blade of grass exists, it cannot comprehend the nature of THAT by which it exists. It is true that the organs function because of the Spirit—but how can the organs know that Spirit? After all, what is the instrument by which the organs know anything? Obviously by its own functional instrument. The ear can know by its function of hearing. No doubt this function can be refined and made sensitive. But after all what will this refined hearing do? It can make the ear aware of many octaves of sound—it can know the structure of sound in a variety of aspects. But the infinite extension of octaves cannot bring the ear nearer to comprehending the very Quality of hearing itself. It can refine its hearing, but it cannot know what hearing itself is. The mind can refine the structure of thought—but how can mind know what the essential quality of thinking is? The mind can know what thought is—but it cannot know what thinking is The quality of thinking cannot be caught in the thought-process by which mind functions. Thinking is a flux—how can it be caught in thought which is static? Thus the functioning faculty of the organ cannot give a comprehension of

the Spirit—such is the teaching of the Kena Upanishad as indicated in the above verses. The question then is —Is the Spirit unknowable? It is true that Spirit is above the known and the unknown—but can IT be comprehended? Or does IT remain unknowable by man?

The above verses of the Upanishad say that to the functional faculties of the organ Brahman or the Spirit remains intangible. For, the verses say that Brahman or Spirit is not what the people here adore. What man adores is what he has caught in his functional faculties. He adores the Immanent but forgets that the Spirit cannot be contained in the framework of the Immanent. That which makes the Immanent alive is the Transcendent—but the Transcendent cannot be caught. IT eludes all forms—it slips out of the grasp of all functional faculties, be they of the body or of the mind. The Spirit remains supremely Intangible—but does this mean that IT is unknowable?

The second part of this Upanishad begins with this inquiry, for in its opening verse the Teacher says:

> If you think "I know Brahman well" then surely you know but little of ITS nature; you know ITS nature only as conditioned by man or by the gods. Therefore, Brahman, even now, is worthy of your inquiry.

The Kena Upanishad says that a man who says he knows Brahman well is a victim of mind's illusions. For, he who says that he knows Brahman well speaks only of the conceptual knowledge. It is a knowledge conditioned by the background of the mind. Even the knowledge of the gods is conditioned by the limitations of the instrument with which knowledge is gathered. Here by knowledge of the gods is to be understood as knowledge gathered through super-physical means. The Teacher says that whether the knowledge of Brahman is acquired through the normal processes of mentation or through super-physical means—all such knowledge is partial. It deals only with the expressions of Brahman—and not with Brahman Itself. Surely all speculation about the Whole, based on the knowledge of the Parts is misleading. The

Whole is not arrived at by just adding the Parts. The Whole is greater than the sum of the parts—and that "something" which renders the Whole greater is bound to be missed in all speculations, even though the speculation may be mathematically precise. It is that "something" which slips out of the mathematical calculations which is most germane to the understanding of the nature of Brahman. Here a question may arise: Is a knowledge of the Parts of any avail in comprehending the nature of Brahman? If it is, then what is its value? Does not man start by understanding the Parts? What he sees first is the Parts—the Whole is unknown to him. Has he not to come to the Unknown through the doorway of the known? If so, what must be the nature of this inquiry?

So far, in the Kena Upanishad we are witnessing a conversation between the Teacher and the disciple. The disciple has been pondering over the instructions of the Teacher, and out of his reflections he comes to a very significant truth which he utters in the following verse:

> I do not think I know Brahman well, nor do I think I do not know IT. He among us who knows not the meaning of "neither do *I know*, nor do I not know"—knows Brahman.

The Disciple says that he cannot declare that he does not know *Brahman* at all—and yet he cannot claim that he knows Brahman. He says he neither knows nor does he not know. To know and yet not to know—this alone is the state where Brahman can be known. What did the disciple know about Brahman? He knew the manifested aspect of Brahman—and manifestation consists of a totality made up of the parts. Having examined part by part, the disciple was able to say that although he did not know Brahman well—he knew something about IT—that aspect of Brahman as was revealed in manifestation. But such knowledge leaves more things un-explained than what it actually explains. The Manifest cannot explain itself save in the light of the Unmanifest. It is the Unmanifest which holds the key to the mystery of the Manifest. It is true that one can know about the be-

haviour of the Manifest—but this behaviour invariably shows certain tendencies for which there is no explanation in the realm of the Manifest. Does this not happen even in ordinary human relationships? We may have witnessed the behaviour of a friend whom we love for many years. On the strength of this behaviour we may say that we know our friend. And yet our friend very often displays such tendencies of behaviour as are completely outside the purview of predictability. On the basis of the knowledge of behaviour, spread over many years, we should be able to predict all aspects of our friend's conduct—and that too with certainty. But such is not the case. Inspite of all our knowledge, our friend remains unpredictable. Surely there is no explanation for this unpredictability in the sphere of knowledge that we have. Its explanation is somewhere else. And so we can say with regard to our friend that we know him and yet we do not know him. We can say with the disciple of the Kena Upanishad that "neither do I not know, nor do I know." To know what knowledge explains, and to know also what knowledge does not explain—this is the highest state knowledge to which mind can go. It shows the limitations of mind's positive knowledge. In the above verse the disciple says that he who knows the meaning of "neither do I not know nor do I know" comes to the comprehension of Brahman. To have in one's consciousness the co-existence of knowing and not-knowing is to bring that consciousness to the highest state of receptivity. The openness of mind consists in the simultaneous existence of knowing and not-knowing. When knowing and not-knowing exist instantaneously then there arrives spontaneously an interval between the Knower and the Known. Usually this interval is covered up by the mind with its projections. But where, having known, the mind declares that it does not know, then the interval remains uncovered—because the mind has nothing with which to cover it. It is in this interval between the Knower and the Known, where the process of knowing has ceased, that there takes place what one must describe

only by the word—Miracle. So far the process of knowing had emanated from the Knower—but now in this interval it is the Known that communicates what IT is to the Knower. But this can happen only when the process of knowing as emanating from the knower ceases so that the interval is not covered by any projection of the knower. It is only when the knower is utterly negative, and yet aware that the known conveys Its secret to him. In the above verse, the Kena Upanishad refers to this interval—the space between knowing and not-knowing. The miracle happening in the interval has been stated beautifully in the following verse of the Kena Upanishad which says:

> He by whom Brahman is not known, knows IT; but by whom IT is known, knows IT not. IT is not known by those who know IT; IT is known by those who do not know IT.

It should be noted that the condition of not-knowing is not a state of inertia. The awareness of not-knowing comes in the wake of all the knowledge that the mind has acquired. The mind that knows what is explained but is not aware of that which has remained unexplained is an *ignorant mind*. In such a mind arises vanity of false knowledge. Since that which is explained can throw no light on that which has remained un-explained, the man of so-called knowledge is devoid of true knowledge. The above verse says—and rightly—that he who says he knows, does not know—while he who says he does not know, truly knows—for he knows the falseness of his own knowledge. Having examined what is explained and having become aware of what has remained un-explained, the inquirer declares that he does not know. When the un-explained cannot be predicated in terms of the explained then truly the inquirer, in all honesty, must state that he indeed does not know. The mind that can declare that it does not know is, by that very declaration, on the threshold of knowledge. Wisdom begins where the mind becomes aware of the falseness of the knowledge that it has acquired. The open mind is one which is conscious of what knowledge has explained and at the same

time aware of what knowledge has not explained. This is a sensitive mind, ready to receive even the subtlest intimation of Brahman—this indeed is the mind that can respond to the Voice of the Silence. The Kena Upanishad says:

> Brahman is known in the ecstasy of an awakening which opens the door of life eternal. By Self we obtain power, and by wisdom we obtain Eternity.

The above verse describes the opening of the door of life eternal as an ecstasy of awakening. The Eternal is not ever-lasting—and so the Eternal is not of the sphere of continuity represented by the time-process. The time-process is the field of mind's operations. All the knowledge that mind gathers is circumscribed by this process. It knows the explanations given by the time-process regarding the phenomena of life. But there is much in life which remains unexplained in terms of the time-process. Its explanation cannot be found by extending the time-scale—for however much the time-scale is extended there is "that something" in life which remains unexplained. When human consciousness comes to that interval between knowing and not-knowing then there opens before it the door of life eternal. It has left behind the field of mind's continuity and it stands before the great Unknown of Discontinuity. It has left behind the continuing process of time and is face to face with the discontinuity of the Timeless. The door of life eternal has opened before him—but such opening has been possible because of the ecstasy of awakening. What is this ecstasy of awakening? The very word ecstasy means a state of being besides oneself. It is a state where man steps out of himself. It is a condition of freedom—freedom from the burden of mind's accumulations. In the interval between knowing and not-knowing the whole burden of mind's accumulations drops away and man is rendered simple and innocent. It is this simplicity and innocence which create a state of ecstasy—the man is beside himself because he has stepped out of his acquired nature, having regained his natural spiritual estate. By being

beside himself, he has come into his own! And what greater power there can be for a man than to come into his own—having wandered into realms other than his own, he has come to his own estate where he instals himself as the Ruler of the Realm. But man comes to the rulership of his own realm only when he is divested of the trappings of his acquired nature. He becomes simple and it is only to the simple that the wisdom of life eternal is vouchsafed. The following verse of the Kena Upanishad presents this idea is a clear and a forceful manner:

> Brahman comes to the thought of those who know IT as beyond thought, not to those who imagine IT can be attained by thought. Brahman is unknown to the learned and known to the simple.

The above verse says that Brahman cannot be attained by the mind—IT comes to the mind. Brahman is not the product of thought—Brahman comes to the thought, but, only of those who have realized the limitations of thought. All attempts of the mind to understand Brahman by its own thought-process are fruitless. All the varied accumulations of the mind are of no avail in knowing Brahman. The verse of the Kena Upanishad says that Brahman is unknown to the learned. And who are the learned? They are those with many possessions. They are those who have many accumulations of the mind—those acquisitions of thoughts which they proudly display as their prized possessions. They cling fast to the tinsel which the mind has collected after much toil, and regard themselves as rich, forgetting that all that glitters is not gold! Brahman is indeed unknown to the learned—IT is known only to the simple. And the simple are those who are free from the burden of mind's accumulations. It is only the meek that shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Strangely enough at this stage in the Kena Upanishad, the Teacher interrupts the profound metaphysical discussion that has been going on so far in order to relate a story to his disciple. This evidently seems to be a digression—but it is not, for the story itself carries further

the main topic under discussion. The Teacher tells his disciple the story about the war between the gods and the demons. In Hindu mythology there are any number of stories regarding the wars between gods and demons. It looks as if the gods and the demons were perpetually at war. This is not strange because they represent the two opposites of the mind. And a continual warfare between the two opposites is indeed the very life of the mind. The Teacher of the Kena Upanishad relates a story about one of these wars in which gods had triumphed over the demons. This victory had gone into the heads of the gods. They felt that they were all-powerful, for, had they not triumphed over the demons by their own prowess? However, the Supreme Spirit realised that this vanity on the part of the gods would be their undoing, and so decided to enlighten them on the real nature of things. The story says that the Supreme Spirit assumed a magnificent form and appeared before them. But the gods could not understand who the Supreme Being was. They therefore decided to find out who He was. For this purpose they deputed Agni, the God of Fire. When Agni approached the Supreme Being, the latter inquired who he was. Agni revealed his identity. The Spirit asked him what power he had by which he had become so well known—and Agni said he could burn anything and everything that may be placed before him. The Spirit put before him a dry blade of grass and asked him to burn it. Agni tried with all his might to burn the dry blade of grass—but he could not burn it. Crest-fallen, he had to return to the gods, declaring that he was unable to find out who the Supreme Being was.

Not daunted by this failure on the part of Agni, the gods asked Vāyu, the Lord of Air, to find out about the nature of this Great Being. When Vāyu revealed his identity and declared that he could sweep off anything on earth, the Great Being placed before him a dry blade of grass and asked him to blow it off. Vāyu rushed towards the blade of grass with all his ardour but could not even lift it from the ground. He too returned to the

gods saying he was unable to find out who the Supreme Being was.

The gods then asked Indra saying "O Maghavan, find out who this great Being is". Indra hastened in the direction of the Supreme Being—but the Spirit completely disappeared before him, and in His place appeared an exquisitely beautiful Woman, highly adorned. She was Umā. Indra asked her who the Great Spirit was. And Umā replied—He was indeed Brahman, the Supreme Spirit, but for Whose help the gods would not have triumphed over the demons.

Why did the Teacher of the Kena Upanishad relate this story to his disciple who was well versed in deep philosophy? What is the meaning of this story? Be it remembered that before the story began we had come to that point in the Kena Upanishad where the disciple had declared that "Brahman comes to the thought of those who know it beyond thought, not to those who imagine It can be attained by thought." The above story conveys this very idea. One may ask: How? The story tells us that the gods wanted to know the nature of the Supreme Being. Let us not forget that the gods represent the mind—what religious books describe as the Higher Mind as against the Lower Mind represented by the demons. Even though the gods may be described as symbolizing the higher mind—still they are part and parcel of the mind with all its possibilities and also with all its limitations. The story says that the higher part of the mind wanted to find out the nature of the Brahman. How did the gods proceed with this inquiry? They sent first Agni, the Lord of Fire. But what is Agni? It is fire which releases the energy that is latent in all beings. The energy lying latent is a condition of inertia or *tamas*. Fire calls out this energy which has been lying latent. In other words, fire awakens the mind from its inertia. It releases the mind from the stupefying influence of *tamas*—one of the conditioning factors of the mind. And so the mind released from the deadening influence of *tamas* goes to find out the nature of the Brahman. But it

returns crest-fallen, for how can the mind, still conditioned by other factors, come to the understanding of Brahman? And so Vāyu, the Lord of Air, goes in search of Brahman. Vāyu sweeps the sky with its power, for he is known as a traveller in space. What indeed is meant by traveller in space? He who travels in space moves swiftly and smoothly, for, he moves without any friction whatsoever. It is a movement without conflict. There is nothing to impede its movement and so its energy is not wasted in any frustrating struggle. One of the factors which conditions the mind is called *rajas* or activity. But why does activity condition the mind? Because it is motivated by conflict. The attribute of *rajas* denotes mind's process of becoming. But this process proves intensely frustrating because of pulls and distractions. The movement of becoming, motivated by mind's desires is beset with obstacles and impediments. Vāyu represents that movement of mind which is free from conflict and friction. This shows a condition in which mind is freed from the influences of *rajas*—the mind is active but its activity is devoid of conflict. And so when Vāyu goes in search of Brahman, it is the mind, freed from the conditioning factor of *rajas* that undertakes the journey. But here too the mind returns—for even though it is freed from *tamas* and *rajas*—inertia and conflict—it is still conditioned by *Sattva* It is true that *sattva* is the highest state of the mind; nevertheless, it is an attribute by which the mind is conditioned. It is a very subtle conditioning—so subtle that man does not even perceive its limiting influence.

In *tamas, rajas* and *sattva* we are concerned with the problems of unrighteousness, righteousness and self-righteousness respectively. *Tamas* is a condition where mind is too lazy to differentiate between the right and the wrong. There is nothing more unrighteous than a confused state of the mind. In *rajas* there is a struggle between the right and the wrong. It is a struggle of the mind to establish a supremacy of what it regards as the right. *Sattva* represents a temporary resolution of the conflict—and this results in self-righteousness. It gives

to mind a sense of power, a sense of rulership, a sense in which it feels that it can keep the two opposites under control.

In the story which we are considering we saw that Agni and Vāyu, representing the mind freed from *tamas* and *rajas* failed to discover the nature of Brahman. And so the gods decided to request Indra himself to go and find out who the Supreme Being is. Indra is verily the god of the gods. He represents the highest that the mind can offer. Indra is the ruler of the gods and presides over his kingdom which is heaven. *Sattva* is indeed the heaven of the mind—it is a realm where harmony prevails. Heaven is that state where, for the time being, the conflict of the opposites has ceased—we deliberately say, for the time-being—because according to Hindu tradition man returns to earth after a temporary stay in heaven! Indra is the ruler of this heavenly state. The gods naturally depend upon Indra to bring them the news of the true nature of the Supreme Being. Mind has nothing further to offer—if Indra fails then surely the gods must reconcile themselves to the condition of not *knowing the* nature of the Supreme Being. Just as Agni symbolizes freedom from *tamas,* just as Vāyu represents freedom from *rajas,* so does Indra indicate that condition of the mind when it is freed from *sattva*. The limiting factor of *sattva* is self-righteousness; here mind clings to its virtues, its accomplishments. The mind that is ridden by *sattva* is afraid of soiling its so-called spiritual robes—and so while it gives, it does so with reservations. The mind limited by the attribute of *sattva* cannot abandon itself in giving what it has. But Indra symbolizes a state where there is generosity without any reserve. The name of Indra used in the Kena Upanishad is Maghavan. This very name shows generosity. Indra wields Vajra or thunderbolt as his weapon and it is with this that, out of the clash of the opposing clouds, he brings down rain on the parched earth to quench its thirst. And so Indra represents a mind that is freed from the limiting factor of *sattva*

But the question is: what does the mind, freed from *tamas, rajas* and *sattva*, see? Is Indra able to discover the nature of Brahman? Is the mind freed from all its three attributes able to comprehend the nature of the Supreme Spirit? Our story says that when Indra approached the Supreme Being, It disappeared from his gaze. There was Nothing, where, a while ago, the Supreme Being was seated. And soon into that Nothing came an exquisitely beautiful Woman, richly adorned, whose name was Umā. And it was she who communicated to Indra the nature of the Supreme Being. What does this signify? The mind that is freed from all its attributes must come face to face with Nothing—for all its projections have vanished. The whole creation of the mind is dissolved—the mind faces an Emptiness. If at this stage the mind calls it as emptiness, if it gives it a name, then in a subtle manner the mind gets entangled once again in its attributes. Indra saw Nothing, and then appeared Umā into that Nothingness. If mind had projected something into that emptiness then surely Umā would not have appeared. But when all the projections of the mind ceased, projections not only through *tamas* and *rajas* but through *sattva* as well, then into that Nothingness came from "somewhere" a Woman of un-surpassing beauty in the form of Umā.

But who is Umā and why does she appear? One of the meanings of the word Umā is Night. It also means tranquility. What can be more tranquil and silent than the night? The mind that is freed from its attributes is face to face with the Silent Night. The night represents a state of un-differentiation. It is during day that differentiations are seen. When the night comes there is a silent unity which pervades—in the darkness of the night all multiplicities have vanished. The mind freed from its attributes must needs face this Night of Emptiness. The mind liberated from even the attribute of *sattva* must stand in front of utter silence. Was Indra afraid of this Silent Emptiness? He was not, for he asked of Umā, the Night, about the nature of the Supreme Being.

It is interesting to note that in that Nothingness, caused by the disappearance of the form of the Supreme Being, there appears a woman of exquisite beauty. Why? It is to indicate that the mind freed from its attributes faces a Night—but it is not a fearsome night. The unknown is never fearsome. If human mind can really come face to face with the Unknown, it has no cause to be afraid. If the pulls of the known have completely dropped away then the Unknown comes in the form of Umā, the woman of exquisite beauty.

But even here the question may arise—Why Umā? It may be remembered that Umā is the consort of Śiva. The Hindu trinity consists of Brahmā, Vishṇu and Śiva. In this Trinity, Śiva is indeed a very interesting aspect. For while, Brahmā remains the Unmanifest—he is not worshipped as a deity, except very rarely— Vishṇu symbolizes the Manifest. Śiva is the presiding deity of what may be called an Interval between the Manifest and the Unmanifest. He is known as the Destroyer. He is known as the Lord of the Burning Ghat—one who lives in a Crematorium. He is where the continuity of the Manifest ends and the discontinuity of the Unmanifest begins. He is the One who has conquered Death. In the Hindu scriptures there is a *mantra* for the propitiation of the Lord of Death. But in this, the deity that is adored and worshipped is Śiva in His form known as *Tryambaka*. It is for Śiva to prolong the span of Continuity by pushing back the forces of Discontinuity —or vice versa, for he is the Guardian of the Interval between the Manifest and the Unmanifest.

The Kena Upanishad says that "Brahman comes to thought", It cannot be attained by thought. But when does It come? It comes only when the continuity of thought ceases—then from the realm of Discontinuity IT comes. It comes only in that Interval over which Śiva presides. As the Hindu Mythology says— Śiva is a wanderer at night. He can be contacted only in the darkness of the night. Thus it is at night, and there only, that Śiva conveys the intimations of the Unmanifest. The

Interval is where the Manifest is not and where the Unmanifest has not arrived. But the arrival of the Unmanifest is proclaimed by Śiva and that too in the darkness of the night. And so our story rightly says that it was Umā who appeared and conveyed to Indra the real nature of the Supreme Being. Man has to discover the nature of Brahman directly—and this can happen only when in the state of mind freed from all its attributes, the human consciousness stands unmoved in front of the dark and the silent night. Then the night conveys its gift to the aspirant. This gift comes anonymously, for the aspirant does not know who has given it—such is indeed the darkness of the night. And the gift comes suddenly, for the aspirant knows only when it arrives in his hands—for how can any movement be seen where the night is dark and silent? And so this fascinating story of Agni, Vāyu, Indra and Umā brings us to that great Upanishadic idea which says that Brahman cannot be attained by thought—It comes to the thought of those whose minds have been freed from its three attributes of *tamas*, *rajaṣ* and *sattva*. "Brahman is unknown to the learned and known to the simple," the mind which is freed from its attributes is utterly simple—it is to such an unconditioned Mind that the Vision of Brahman comes.

The Kena Upanishad says that "Brahman is seen in Nature in the wonder of a flash of lightning—He comes to the soul in the wonder of a flash of vision."

The Kena Upanishad says that Brahman comes in Nature like a flash of lightning. Now the flash of lightning comes suddenly, instantaneously, out of the dark clouds which turn even day into night. Nobody knows from where the flash of lightning will come—nor does anyone know when it will come. Sometimes the sky remains overcast with dark clouds for a long period of time without any break causing the flash of lightning. But there are times when the break occurs all of a sudden. The flash of lightning vanishes as suddenly as it comes. It cannot be grasped, it cannot be put in the framework of time. The flash of lightning may be constant

but it cannot be continuous. The lightning which is continuous is no lighting at all. It can only come in flashes—and each flash illumines the darkened path of man. Even though it lasts for a moment, that moment is so brilliant with light that the way is seen in all its vividness. The Teacher of the Kena Upanishad says that Brahman comes to man in the wonder of a flash of vision. Its appearance is so sudden that man is wonder-struck. And It comes like a flash in which is seen very clearly the path that lies before man. Brahman cannot be gradually perceived. It comes instantaneously and so he who is awake can see. To the awakened man, the flash is like a new Vision. This Vision pervades the entire being of man—he who has had a Vision of Brahman cannot be the same man again. The Kena Upanishad says that Brahman "is known when It is realized in every state of mind." What does every state of mind mean? Since mind is reflected in every pattern of one's being the Kena Upanishad says that when Brahman is known, every part of man's being is transformed. There is then no gap between perception and conduct. The very perception brings about a total revolution. It is not that one perceives Brahman and then starts practising what he has perceived.

The Kena Upanishad says that the arrival of Brahman is "like a wink of the eye". The revelation of Brahman is instantaneous—as sudden and quick as the wink of an eye. The experience of Brahman is momentary—but that moment has the richness of Eternity. Brahman or Reality can be experienced from moment to moment. Any desire to extend the moment would mean bringing the perception of Brahman in the time-process. But how can the Transcendent be ever perceived in the region of Time? It is only in the time-less moment that Brahman can be known. Does this mean that for the experience of Brahman one must discard living in the time-process? How can one discard the time-process? The day-to-day activities of man must needs be in the time-process. But he who has had the momentary glimpse of Brahman in the time-less moment returns to the time-process with

a sense of ecstasy. He fills the time-process with that ecstasy. He is no longer the same person. He brings into the time-process a fragrance of the Time-less. Although Brahman comes like a flash of lightning, such is the brilliance of that flash that it illumines the entire being of man.

The Kena Upanishad says that Brahman is *Tadvanam*—meaning, the Beloved of all. And how does one adore the Beloved? Surely through Love. The Kena Upanishad says that it is only the adoration of Love which brings one to the experience of Brahman. It is only when human consciousness is filled with love that it experiences the arrival of Brahman. Reality comes not to a man of suppression and mortification. It comes suddenly when man is in a state of Love. Needless to say, love is not burdened with knowledge. Love is a state of utter simplicity. Love is not a product of mind's cultivation. Love arises in a mind which is freed from all its accumulations. Does love offer its accumulations to the Beloved? In approaching the Beloved, love puts away all its accumulations and offers itself to the Beloved. Bereft of all accumulations, when man stands alone in utter simplicity then, to such a man, Brahman comes in all its glory and majesty.

The Teacher of the Kena Upanishad instructs the disciple to worship Brahman as *Tadvanam*—for He is the Beloved of all—and, so, only along the Path of Love can He be found.

III

THE GREAT BEYOND

The Kaṭha Upanishad is the most widely known among all the Upanishads. Many Western scholars have described it as "one of the perfect specimens of the mystic philosophy and poetry of the ancient Hindus". The reason why this Upanishad has received such world-wide acclaim is not far to seek. It is the theme of Death discussed in the Kaṭha Upanishad which has evoked great respect for its teachings both in the East as well as in the West. From the earliest times death has been one of the most baffling problems of man. It has been a never-ceasing challenge to the intellect of man. Modern man who has achieved so much in the field of science and technology stands utterly helpless in front of death. He may know how to conquer outer space—but in regard to conquest over death he is as ignorant as the primitive man. Unable to establish a mastery over death, man seeks with all his might to prolong earthly existence. If man could extend his span of life on earth then death would at least be postponed—for he knows that when the hour of death strikes, it would be powerless for him to do anything.

But death is such an unpredictable moment that even when the life span is extended, man is constantly in fear of being caught in the jaws of death. With this fear, dogging his steps, how can he be happy even when earthly existence is prolonged? Death is not only unpredictable, it is overpowering too, for when its call comes man feels utterly helpless. And furthermore death comes with a demand which is total—for it asks us to leave everything and follow it empty-handed. The demand of death seems merciless, for nothing whatever can be carried over its doorstep. And so the prolongation of earthly existence

is hardly any consolation to man—for, he knows that the call of death may come any moment. In the midst of the joys of prolonged existence there is for ever the shadow of death cast over man. Of what use is the extended life-span if the shadow of death is always present? There is no escape from death, and so man must face it and demand from it the secret that it holds. For when the secret of death is known then can man say out of his own experience—"O, death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory"? It is neither the prolongation of earthly existence nor the knowledge about the after-death condition that can free man from the fear of death. Once again it is not a belief in re-incarnation or the immortality of the soul that can liberate man from the spectre of death. Man must know the Secret of Death—and this secret is known to none other than death itself. It is death and death alone that can communicate that secret—there is no other path but a direct communion with Death if man is to know this Secret of secrets without knowing which he must remain a stranger to the joys of life. But how can man extract this secret from death? It is this path which is indicated by Kaṭha Upanishad, where Yama, the Lord of Death, is the Teacher and Naciketā, the intrepid young inquirer, is the Disciple.

In the Upanishads we find an intimate relationship existing between the Teacher and the Disciple. It is a relationship in which the Teacher and the Disciple are in communion with each other. It is to indicate this relationship that this Upanishad begins with a very significant invocation. The Invocation says:

> May Brahman protect us both. May Brahman bestow upon us both the fruit of knowledge. May we both obtain the energy to acquire knowledge. May the study of us both reveal the Truth. May we cherish no ill-feeling towards each other.

As is evident, the above Invocation is recited by both the Teacher and the Disciple together. Both together ask for the obtaining of energy to acquire knowledge, for the seeking of knowledge requires much energy. Any wasting of energy would be detrimental to the pur-

suit of knowledge. In order that such wasting may not take place there has to be extraordinary clarity on the part both of the teacher and the disciple. The above Invocation says: "May the study of us both reveal the Truth". The Teacher and the Disciple are concerned with Truth—and Truth has to be discovered. The method of teaching contained in the Upanishads leads both the teacher and the disciple to discovery. The relationship between the teacher and the student is not static—it is intensely dynamic—it is a relationship in which the teacher and the student both learn together.

The last sentence of the Invocation says: "May we cherish no ill-feeling towards each other". A communion is possible when there is perfect understanding between the teacher and the student. When education becomes a journey together into the realms of Truth—then there comes into existence a relationship of respect and consideration between the two. In the Upanishads one sees this relationship of respect between the teacher and the student all throughout. There is a discipline, but it is one which is born out of freedom—for here it is not the one *that* teaches the other—it is both together learn from Truth itself.

The Kaṭha Upanishad is a beautiful example of this relationship of the teacher and the disciple. And the above Invocation is a fitting prelude to the great teaching on the subject of Death—a profound subject discussed in all seriousness by Yama, the Lord of Death and Naciketā, the young inquirer. But before we can enter into this discussion we must know the circumstances under which Naciketā went in search of the great Secret of Death.

It seems a rishi by the name Vājasravas was engaged in performing what is known as Viśvajit sacrifice with the sole purpose of getting heavenly rewards. The name Vājasravas means one who has become famous by distributing food. Now distribution of food is a symbol—it indicates performance of religious practices as ordained by the scriptures. And so Vājasravas represents traditional

religion which requires the observance of certain outer practices with a view to get heavenly rewards. The traditional religion is one which is interested in rites and ceremonies, in the injunctions of the priest and the scripture, in the acceptance of creeds and dogmas and in the observance of certain patterns of behaviour and conduct. Vājasravas represents such conventional or traditional religion. He had a son called Naciketā. Now the word Naciketā signifies *Na-ciketā* which means something unperceived—something that is beyond the normal range of perception. And so Naciketā symbolises mysticism in religion—that aspect of religion which goes to the core of things and is not concerned merely with the outer behaviour or pattern of conduct. Naciketā is the son of Vājasravas—this itself is very significant. For, the history of religion tells us that when religion deteriorates into lifeless patterns of behaviour, there appear from time to time new expressions of mysticism which bring the human individual back to the fundamentals of spiritual life. And it is in the bosom of traditional religion that mysticism is born, raising a banner of revolt against the dead forms of conventional religious practices. It is with such revolt that Kaṭha Upanishad is concerned.

In the sacrifice which Vājasravas was performing, he was engaged in distributing goods and cattle in charity to the Brahmins. Naciketā watched this great act of charity —but he found that this pattern of charity was devoid of any spirit of charity. It was a charitable action but without any charitable content. For, he saw that his father was giving away in charity such cows as were utterly useless. And so he said to himself:

> By giving such cows that can calve no more and can give no more milk, and are even past drinking their water and are even past eating their grass, surely no man goes to heaven. He goes to no worlds of joy.

Here we find the mysticism of religion rising in revolt against the traditional religion. But what could the little boy say to the mighty father? And besides the father was well versed in the traditional forms of religion—he could

easily silence the little boy by a show of learning. But Naciketā, too, was irrepressible—the flame of revolt had been lighted and could not be extinguished by mere head-learning in which his father was proficient. Naciketā asked his father who was giving away his cattle in charity: "Father, to whom will you give me?" The father pretended that he had not heard what the son had said. But Naciketā repeated the same question thrice. The father knew what the son was indicating by that question and so in great anger he replied saying: 'Unto death do I give you". Naciketā must have been taken aback by this reply of the father—but there was no going back for him. The father had given him in charity to Death—and so to Death he must go. The father was full of repentance and it was for Naciketā to console him. Naciketā thus addressed his father who was immersed in sorrow, realising that his son would soon proceed to the abode of Yama:

> Remember how the men of old passed away, and how those of days to come will also pass away; a mortal ripens like corn, and like corn is born again.

Naciketā tells his father that after all death is a normal affair—people died in the past and so will die in future too. Why should one be frightened of death, for, man ripens like corn and like corn is born again. From this it is clear that Naciketā was well aware of the idea of reincarnation. After all birth and death is an ever-recurring cycle—those who are born must die and those who die must be born again. Vājasravas who represented traditional religion should have been satisfied with this conventional explanation of the phenomenon of death given by his son.

And so Naciketā proceeds to the abode of Yama, the Lord of Death—but when he reaches his destination, he finds that Yama is away. Naciketā waits, for his mission to death would be incomplete without meeting the King of Death. For three nights he waited and the nights in the abode of death must have been fearsome. But after this long waiting he finds Yama returning to his palace. Yama is full of apologies to the young Brahmin whom he

had kept waiting without any hospitality being offered to him. Why was Naciketā not offered any hospitality while Yama was away? The inmates of Yama's palace must have found it strange that a mortal should voluntarily go to the abode of death. They were accustomed to see people being brought to Yama—but Naciketā's was the solitary instance where he had gone to death—he was not brought to death. The inmates of the palace of Yama must have felt utterly at a loss to know how to treat such a strange visitor who had gone knocking at the door of death—instead of death knocking at his door. And so Naciketā, fearless inquirer that he was, waited at the door of death even though no hospitality was given to him. Yama must have realized that here was a young man of strong determination and deep inquiry.

And so offering his apologies, Yama told Naciketā to ask for three boons as a recompense for the three nights during which he was kept waiting. Naciketā must have realized that he was in front of some one who had power and strength unsurpassed for he started asking for boons in a very cautious manner, lest the Lord of Death be annoyed with him. The first boon that Naciketā asked for was:

> O Lord of Death, may my father's anger be appeased and may he be happy and free from anxiety, and may he remember me and welcome me after my leaving you. This be my first boon.

Here Naciketā is concerned about the after-death condition. The traditional religion speaks of man entering the Kāma-loka —the astral world soon after his death. It is a state where emotional experiences preponderate. The sensorial experiences have been cast away with the shedding of the physical body. Naciketā wants to be sure that his passage through the emotional state would be free from pain and anguish. If Yama could assure him that his father would be happy and free from anxiety and would remember him with affection then he would naturally be greatly relieved. Yama readily grants this first boon of Naciketā.

The traditional religions, particularly Hinduism and

Buddhism, believe that during the after-death condition, man passes on from *Kāma-loka* or the Astral world to the *Svarga-loka* or the Heaven world where he lives for a considerable time, reaping the harvest of all the good deeds done during earthly existence. This is a period of uninterrupted pleasure. It is said that after man has done all the reaping of his good harvest, he returns to earth. Now Naciketā who seems to be moving cautiously before coming to the main theme of his inquiry, asks Yama to give him the second boon which he states thus:

> There is no fear in the regions of heaven; old age and death are not there. Having passed both they rejoice in heaven, beyond hunger and thirst and sorrow. Those in heaven enjoy long continuity. You know, O Death, that sacred fire which leads to heaven. Explain it to me—be this my second boon.

Naciketā asks Death to tell him about the sacred fire which leads to heaven. Most commentators have described the condition in the heaven world as denoting immortality. Surely there can be no immortality in the heaven world, for according to traditional religion the heaven world too ends. Needless to say immortality and end cannot be together—they are contradiction in terms. And so here, in this context, the word immortality has to be interpreted as "long continuity"—an almost endless continuity of time. It is interesting to note that Naciketā first wants to understand the problem of death in terms of continuity. And so in his second boon he asks Yama to tell him about the sacred fire that leads to heaven. Yama is naturally greatly pleased with this young man who seems to be asking "proper questions" and so gives to him most willingly the knowledge about the sacred fire. He imparts to him all the details regarding the lighting of this fire. Indeed, so pleased is Yama that he grants an additional unasked boon—and that is, that this sacred fire would in future be known as Naciketā Fire in honour of this brave and intrepid young inquirer. Yama says to Naciketā:

> This is the fire that leads to heaven which you chose as the second gift. Men will call it Naciketā's Fire-sacrifice. Choose now the third boon.

What was the third boon that Naciketā asked of Yama? Be it remembered that Naciketā had not gone all the way to the Lord of Death only to know about the after-death condition. He was not seeking a seemingly endless continuity of the heaven world—he knew that this continuity had an end. He was well aware of the fact that there was re-incarnation—the corn ripening and being born again. But after-death condition and re-incarnation seemed to him a never-ceasing chain devoid of meaning and purpose. Of what use was this chain of continuity with birth, death and rebirth appearing in ever-recurring cycle? Naciketā was seeking something more fundamental than merely the after-death condition. He formulates clearly his deep inquiry in asking for the third boon. Naciketā asks Yama the following fundamental question:

> When a man dies, this doubt arises: some say there is a "being" and some say there is "no-being". Teach me the truth and let this be my third boon.

Naciketā wants to know what happens in the actual moment of death—not what prevails in the after-death condition. His inquiry is—Is there a continuity of "being" in death—or is there no continuity of "being"? What is actually in the moment of death—Being or Non-being? In the hour of death, is there Existence or Non-existence? This is a profound metaphysical question which Naciketā has put to Yama. The traditional approaches to death are all concerned with finding out about the after-death condition. They are interested either in the prolongation of earthly existence or the continuity of after-death state. It is mysticism which is supremely concerned with the moment of dying—with death itself. It wants to know what happens in the actual moment of death—neither before nor after. In the above verse Naciketā asks the question about "*when* a man dies"—*not after* a man dies. He is not concerned as to whether there is existence or not after death—he wants to know whether there is existence or non-existence in the actual moment of death. In other words, Naciketā is not inquiring about survival after death—he wants to know what happens in the moment of

death itself. By this question, Naciketā has put Yama in a very embarrassing position. And so Yama replies:

> This doubt arose even to the gods in times of old; for subtle and mysterious is the law of life and death. Ask for another boon. Release me from this.

So awkward is the condition of Yama that he asks Naciketā to release him from the granting of this boon. He says: "Ask another boon". But why? Yama says even the gods have not been able to find an answer to this question. But who are the gods? They are the beings with super-physical perception. He says even those with super-physical, or Occult powers have not been able to find an answer to this question because life and death are a mysterious phenomenon. It is not by journeying into invisible realms that man can unravel this great mystery. Yama says that the problem of life and death is so subtle that even men with higher faculties have not been able to understand it. And so he asks Naciketā to leave this subtle and mysterious question and ask for something else.

But Naciketā was not an ordinary inquirer—he knew what he was seeking. He tells Yama that if this is a very difficult question then where is he to go for an answer. He tells him that in all the worlds there is no other teacher who can explain the mystery of death as the Lord of Death himself. He makes it clear to Yama that there is no other boon greater than this—for he must know the mystery of death—and that too from the king of Death himself. But Yama again pleads with Naciketā and requests him to release him from the obligations of granting this boon. He says to him:

> Take horses and gold and cattle and elephants. Choose sons and grandsons that shall live a hundred years. Have vast expanses of land, and live as many years as you desire. Or choose another gift that you deem equal to this, and enjoy it with wealth and long life. Be a ruler of this vast earth. I will give you all you desire.
>
> Ask for any wishes in the world of mortals, however hard to obtain. To attend on you I will give you fair maidens with their chariots and their melodious music.
>
> But, O Naciketā do not ask me about the Secret of Death.

From the above verses it is quite evident that Yama has used all his persuasive powers to wean away Naciketā from the inquiry on which he was resolutely insistent. Yama has placed before him many temptations—such as would have broken the determination of anyone. All these temptations cover a wide variety of man's interests. Yama has given this variety in the hope that this young man may fall somewhere, and give up his inquiry. In fact, Yama is prepared to do anything, only if Naciketā would *give up* asking him about the Secret of Death. *The Lord of Death* seems to be approaching Naciketā almost with folded hands, telling him: "O, Naciketā do not ask me about the Secret of Death".

But Naciketā was above all temptations. He had entered the Palace of Death not for nothing. He was determined to stay on until he found the Secret of Death, and that too from Yama himself. And so to all the persuasive eloquence of Yama, Naciketā *replies resolutely* thus:

> All these pleasures pass away, O End of All; They destroy the life-giving power. And indeed how short is life. And so keep the horses and dancing and singing to yourself. Man cannot be satisfied with wealth. How can we even *enjoy* wealth with you in sight? Can we live whilst you are in power? No, I can only ask for the boon I have asked.

It is interesting to note that all that Yama has offered to Naciketā belong to the world of mortals. He was prepared to give him the utmost in the realm of the mortals. Yama said in so many words when he stated: "Ask for any wishes in the world of mortals, however hard to obtain". Wealth and long life, rulership of the vast earth and fair maidens with their chariots and singing, gold and cattle, sons and grandsons living upto a hundred years—all these belong to the mortal world. Yama has been careful not to mention anything whereby Naciketā would encroach upon the realm of immortality. He was ready to grant him long continuity in earthly life but he must keep away from the kingdom over which he presided. He could have the pleasures of continuity but not the secret of im-

mortality. But Naciketā was brilliant in his intellect—he saw what was being offered by Yama. He rightly says: How can men live so long as death rules over them? In the above verse he calls Yama by the epithet—*Antaka*—meaning the End of All. He says how can man enjoy wealth when Yama is in sight? Yama may give to man with one hand but with the other he may take away all that he has given. When death knocks at the door, of what use are wealth and power and pomp? And so Naciketā says to Yama: "Keep the horses and dancing and singing to yourself for, I cannot be tempted by any of these". Inspite of all the persuasions of Yama, Naciketā declares in unmistakable terms thus to the Lord of Death:

> Solve then this doubt as to the meaning of the Great Beyond. Grant me the gift that pierces the veil of mystery. This is the only boon Naciketā can choose.

Yama had probably not come across any inquirer of such integrity as Naciketā. Finding that no temptation could distract Naciketā from his main subject of inquiry, Yama now prepares his young disciple to receive the Great Secret. In this work of preparation, Yama begins by telling Naciketā about the Two Paths. He says:

> The Good is one thing; the pleasant another. Both of these serving different ends are linked to man. It goes well with him who, of the two, takes the Good, but he who chooses the Pleasant misses the end.

Here Yama indicates the two paths—one denoting the Good and the other denoting the pleasant. But are the Good and the Pleasant opposed to each other? It is pleasure and pain which constitute the opposites. They, like all opposites, always go together. The opposites of the mind are such that one is contained in the other. Pain is contained in pleasure—it cannot be separated from it. He who seeks pleasure must be ready to receive pain also. To ask for pleasure and to demand that it should be free from pain is to ask for the impossible. In the very pursuit of pleasure, pain is always imperceptibly present. The cause of pain is in the pleasure itself—for pain is indeed the product of pleasure. Yama says he who moves along the path

of pleasure misses the end, for he gets entangled in the never-ending play of the opposites.

In preparing Naciketā for the receiving of the great truth regarding Death, Yama indicates to him the Path of the Good that must be pursued. Now what is this Path of the Good—and how is it better than the Path of the pleasant? Surely the Good about which Yama speaks is not the opposite of Evil. If he talks of Good as opposed to the Evil then there is hardly any difference between the two paths. If they are opposites then each is contained in the other—and evil must be present where good is. The pairs of opposites, whatever they may be, work together—they are like the shadow and the substance. Of what use is the Path of Good if Evil is contained in it? Obviously Yama here speaks of Good as Absolute Good—not the good which is the product of mind's opposites. The play of the opposites is the sphere of mind's continuity. The two opposites are the frontiers of the Land of Continuity. Thought which is the instrument of the mind moves within these frontiers. Now if Good is not the product of the opposites then surely it must be outside the frontiers of the mind. Absolute Good is that which is not reached by the mind. It is outside the sphere of mind's continuity. And so in describing the Two Paths, Yama has indeed indicated the two distinct categories of experience—one which is within the confines of continuity, and the other which lies beyond. The path of pleasure lies within the frontiers of the mind but the Path of Good lies beyond those frontiers. Since Naciketā has asked about the meaning of the Great Beyond, Yama indicates to him at the very beginning that it is along the Path of the Good that the secret of the Great Beyond can be found.

Yama congratulates Naciketā for discarding the path of the pleasant and accepting the Path of the Good. Yama says to his young disciple:

> You have pondered, Naciketā, on pleasures and you have rejected them. You have not accepted that chain of possessions wherewith men bind themselves and beneath which they sink. There is the path of Wisdom and the path of unwisdom. They

> are far apart and lead to different ends. You are, Naciketā, follower of the path of wisdom—may pleasures move you not.

It should be clearly understood that Wisdom is not something opposed to ignorance. Wisdom has no opposite. It arises when both ignorance and knowledge are negated. In the above verse Yama says that men sink because they become heavy with the possessions which they have accumulated. Obviously the path of Wisdom is one where man becomes lighter having shed all his possessions—and is therefore able to swim easily in the current of life. The man of Wisdom is not one who sits idly on the shores, unconcerned about the current of life. He is in the current but does not sink, for bereft of all possessions, having nothing to guard or defend, he can abandon himself to the current of life. Such a person of abandonment cannot sink because the stream itself protects him. Yama says in the above verse that the man of unwisdom, "childish, careless and deluded by wealth", goes again and again to death. He remarks that they go to death again and again, but never actually die. He who knows how to die does not have to go to death again and again—it is death that comes to him, not as a Master wanting to carry away the slave, but as a friend and a companion, making life all the richer even as light and shade together give beauty to the landscape. By the phrase "going again and again to death" Yama obviously means to indicate that they come again and again under his sway. But the wise are not under the sway of death—they have conquered death and so move with death even while living. They who come again and again under the sway of Death are not even aware of the Great Beyond. Yama says:

> Not many are those who hear of It, and of those not many reach It. Wonderful is he who can teach about It, and wise is he who can be taught. Wonderful is he who knows It when taught by the wise.

It is obvious that he alone can teach about the Great Beyond who himself has known it. But this knowing is not by a process of thinking. How can the thought process take a man beyond the realm of thought? And the Great

Beyond is most assuredly outside the frontiers of thought. Yama says that "It is higher than the highest thought, and is above all thought". But then how can the Great Beyond be found? Yama says: "The way to It is the Teacher". It is not the teaching that can indicate the path—it is only the Teacher who can point the way. The Teacher is greater than the teaching. While the Teacher contains the teaching, the teaching can never contain the Teacher. The Teacher is always beyond the teaching; for he remains the unmanifest inspite of the teaching that he may have manifested. Wisdom arises only when the teacher and the taught are in a state of communion. Real communication is possible only where communion exists. As Yama remarks: "The sacred knowledge is not obtained through reasoning". The secret is communicated by the teacher to the pupil only in a state of communion. Naciketā has found a Teacher in the person of Yama. For Naciketā Death indeed is the Teacher. And Yama says that the Great Secret cannot be found by reasoning—but only by a communion with the Teacher. If Naciketā wants to know the meaning of the Great Beyond then he must be in communion with the Lord of Death who is the teacher. Yama says that the secret of death can be known *only* by communing with death—there is no other way.

Yama says to Naciketā that he has indeed come to a state of communion where the Great Secret can be communicated. He describes this condition of communion beautifully when he says: " Naciketā is like a house open for the Lord". Naciketā has rendered his house open for the Lord to walk in. By rejecting the path of pleasure and possession he has made his house vacant for the Lord to reside. It is by the process of negation that Naciketā has created space—enormous space—in his house for the Lord to move. There can be no communion so long as the mind of man is engaged in positive action. By no positive effort can space be created in the mind of man. And it is only when there is space that the Teacher and the disciple can come together. A movement is possible only in space. But any movement by the disciple fills up the space and

therefore renders it ineffective for communion. When all the activities of the disciple cease then in that House of Inaction, the Lord arrives. The mind of man cannot go to Truth—it is Truth that comes to the human mind—but it can come only when the mind is open, bereft of all possessions. Naciketā had come to such a state and therefore the Teacher says that ' Naciketā is like a house open for the Lord". Yama begins his instruction by telling Naciketā that:

> When the wise rest their minds on God that is beyond Time, hard to be seen, dwelling in the mystery of things, then he rises above joy and sorrow.

How can mind rest on God that is beyond Time? Mind can function only within the framework of Time—how can it dwell on something that is beyond Time? Here the resting of the mind signifies the mind that has come to rest. In such a mind there is no movement. There is a stillness, a deep silence. It is only here that man can come to the experience of God that is beyond Time, He who dwells in the mystery of things. It is in this experience that man rises beyond joy and sorrow, beyond pleasure and pain. It is in deep silence, and there alone, that man discovers the Good—*for the* Good is beyond the pairs of opposites. But here Naciketā asks a very pertinent question to Yama—his *question is:*

> Tell me what you see beyond right and wrong, beyond what is done and not done, beyond past and future.

This is the most difficult question which Naciketā has put—for how can any one say what is beyond right and wrong—or beyond what is done and not done? One can easily explain the opposites by contrasting one with the other. One opposite helps to explain the other—but where there is no opposite, with what can the explanation be given? In the language of the opposites there is no explanation for that which is beyond right and wrong—and outside the field of opposites there is no language with which to explain! Since language is the instrument of thought the boundaries of its field are naturally set by thought. *And so* Naciketā has put Yama in a very embarrassing

position by asking this question for which there is no answer either in the field of thought or in the field of language. Naciketā asks Yama as to what is beyond Past and Future. Now past and future constitute the time-process. He wants to know what is beyond the time-process. Once again how can this be explained? Needless to say communication exists in the relative world—in the world of the Absolute no communication is necessary—for in a world of non-duality who is to communicate with whom? This communication or language is the instrument employed in the world of the relative. And the relative world exists in time-scale. It is utterly meaningless to make an attempt to explain the Timeless in the language of time. The instruments of the relative world are totally inadequate to give an understanding of the Absolute. Then what is the answer that Yama gives to this very difficult question which Naciketā has put to him?

> The Approach which all the Vedas declare, which all austerities indicate, and which men accept when they lead the life of continence, I will tell you briefly—it is OM.

Yama is careful to use the word *Padam*—an Approach while replying to this difficult question of his young disciple. An approach obviously indicates a direction. Yama says those who are intent on spiritual life pursue a particular direction. Vedas being knowledge also point to that direction. And it is only the direction that can be indicated. All scriptures, all gurus, all that is expressed by word or symbol or gesture—all these are but fingers pointing the way. They are like pointers indicating the path that may be traversed by the aspirant who wishes to come to the realization of spiritual verities. Yama too does not tell Naciketā in positive terms what lies beyond the Past and the Future or beyond right and wrong—he only indicates an approach, a direction. If Naciketā wants to know about the Beyond then he must traverse that path for himself. As a true Teacher, Yama is only pointing a finger in that direction. But we may ask what is the direction that Yama has indicated in reply to Naciketā's question concerning the Beyond? Yama says, this direction,

this approach, this *Padam,* is the Sacred word—OM. What is this OM? Is it just a syllable of three letters which are A.U.M.? If so, how does this three-lettered syllable explain the great Beyond between the Past and the Future, between the right and the wrong? In the Hindu scriptures much instruction is given as to how this Sacred Word should be pronounced. OM is considered as the generalized symbol of all possible sounds. It is obvious that all articulate sounds are produced in the space between the root of the tongue and the lips. If properly pronounced OM represents the whole gamut of sound-production. One of the explanations given of the three letters A.U.M. is that they represent creation, preservation and destruction respectively. The sound *A* arises from the root of the tongue—where the tongue does not touch any part of the palate. And the sound *M* is the last sound terminating with the lips. In between is the sound *U* which represents the rolling forward of the impulse that begins at the root of the tongue and ends at the lips. And so all the articulate sounds lie between the letters *A* and *M*. But one may ask what has all this to do with the question about the Beyond which Nachiketa has raised?

Be it remembered that OM is not just a three-lettered *syllable.* By practice one can pronounce it correctly according to the rules of sound production. But the significance of OM lies in not what is uttered—but what remains un-uttered. It is not the articulate but the inarticulate sound which holds the key to the understanding of the Sacred Word. The articulate sound depends upon the inarticulate. Yama says, the mystery of the Beyond lies in the Great Word OM, but the mystery can be unravelled not in the articulate but in the inarticulate nature of the sound.

When Yama declares that the mystery of the Beyond lies in the Word, one is reminded of the famous sentence appearing in Christian scriptures, in the Gospel according to St. John, where it is stated that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". In the beginning was the Word—but can the Word be found by going to the beginning? To go to the

beginning is to explore the Time-process. Can the Word be found in the stream of Time? No, for it is said that "the Word was with God". And so one must ask God to give us the meaning of the Word which contains the unravelling of the great mystery of the Beyond. But how to get that word from God? Will God tell us where He has placed that Word so that by travelling thither we may find it? But the above statement says that "the Word was God"—That the Word and God were not different. To say that Word was God is to speak of the co-existence of the Manifest and the Unmanifest. The Word was with God and yet the Word was God. He uttered the Word and yet kept the Word with Himself. And so if the Word contains the mystery then surely one must know God—God the manifest and God the unmanifest.

Yama tells Nachiketa that the mystery of the Beyond lies in OM. The question may arise: Is OM just the spoken Word—or is it something more? To use the phraseology of the Kena Upanishad one might say it is the Word of the Words: OM is that which enables all articulate words to come into existence. It covers the entire gamut of sound production and yet it is not the articulate sound. It is That which has remained inarticulate even after all the articulate sounds have been produced. This idea becomes clearer as one turns to the next verse of the Kaṭha Upanishad which says:

> This syllable OM is indeed Brahman. This syllable is the Highest. Whosoever knows this syllable obtains all that he desires.

Thus OM is equated here with Brahman. And Brahman is manifest even when It is unmanifest. The Word OM is the meeting place of both the Manifest and the Unmanifest—the articulate and the inarticulate—the sound that is uttered but at the same time the sound that has remained un-uttered. While in the former verse the Word was described as *Padam* in the second verse it is denoted by the term *Akshara*. Now *Akshara* means the Imperishable. OM is indeed *Akshara Brahma*—The Imperishable One. If it were only the articulate sound then it would be perishable—it is only the inarticulate that is Imperish-

can there be than being charitable to the views of others? The demons too came to *Virāj* for final instruction. They represent *tamas* or inertia of the mind. Inertia too has its place—for it gives stability. Stability, Activity and Harmony are indeed the three functions of the mind. But these functions become limitations, and, when this happens, then Intelligence cannot shine forth to illumine the mind of man. To demons representing *tamas* or inertia, Intelligence gives the same message of DA—but to them it must mean *Dayadhvam* —sensitivity or sympathy. While *tamas* gives stability—a mere stability would mean death if there is no sensitivity in it. Out of *tamas* must arise activity—but this can happen only when the attribute of *tamas* shows forth a responsiveness. There must be mobility of consciousness in the midst of the stability of structure. When this happens, then *tamas* becomes an instrument of Intelligence and no longer a limitation. Humility, Charity and Sensitivity—this is the instruction of *Virāj* or Intelligence to the functioning attributes of the mind. For, thus alone mind can be illumined by *Buddhi* or Intelligence. And it is Intelligence that perceives the intimations of the Unmanifest in the Manifest. Intelligence is indeed the bridge that leads from Immanence to Transcendence, from the Manifest to the Unmanifest.

The Upanishad says that Nature speaks to man through thunder and lightning this message of DA-DA-DA. It is the Intelligence in Nature speaking to the Intelligence in man. The Upanishad says:

> The principle of Intelligence is verily Brahman. Like the gossamer web which spins out of the spider's body or like the sparks that spring and fly from the Flame, it is Intelligence which conveys to man the great tidings of Brahman.

Intelligence alone brings to man the intimations of the Unmanifest, it conveys to him the Voice of the Silence, it communicates to him the Call of the Unborn. The man to whom such intimations have come is a spiritually illumined person—he is the one with a Divine Afflatus in him—he speaks the language, not of words, but of the Spirit for, he is an inspired being.

Śvetāśvatara Upanishad:

XI

THE ONE—AND THE ONLY ONE

The Śvetāśvatara Upanishad is not included among the Ten Major or Principal Upanishads. And yet such is the beauty and profundity of its teachings that most persons who have commented on the Upanishads have regarded this Upanishad, as if it were one of the major Upanishads. This Upanishad derives its name from the teacher by the name Śvetāśvatara. It begins with an informal discussion among themselves by students, desirous of knowing the eternal verities of life. The subject matter of their discussion is indicated in the opening verse of the Upanishad. It says:

> What is the Cause? Is it Brahman? Whence are we born? What sustains us? Whither are we going? Who distributes pleasures and pain in the differing conditions of life?

These *brahmavādins*—the students engaged in deep inquiry—want to know the Cause of the Universe. Usually there are mainly two causes for the creation of anything. These two causes are the *Upādāna* and *Nimitta*—the material and the efficient. The material cause deals with the materials constituting an object of creation and the efficient cause deals with the instrument or the subject that brings the creation into existence—these are the objective and the subjective causes. For example, for the creation of an earthen pot, clay is the *upādāna* or the material cause —but the potter is the *nimitta* or the efficient cause. In order to go into the question of causation, one must inquire into both these causes. In discussing among themselves, these students of the Divine wisdom asked, "Is time the cause? Or is the very nature of things that has caused this universe? Or has the universe come into existence by some mysterious working of destiny? Or has the universe been brought into existence by the coming together

of the Elements? Or is it that the combination of all these causes is the cause of the universe?" Having examined each cause separately and conjointly, they came to the conclusion that none of the above factors could have been the cause of the universe—they may have contributed to the material cause, having supplied the material—but they could not have been the efficient or the instrumental cause. The earthen pot cannot come into existence just because there is a lump of clay lying about. There has to be a potter to use the clay for the creation of the pot. They found the absence of the potter in all the above factors. And so they said that even a combination of all these material factors could not have created the universe. Then surely, the Soul must be the cause of the universe. But they ruled out even the Soul saying it is *Aniśa* —powerless—for it too is affected by pleasure and pain. If the soul cannot free itself from the effects of pain and pleasure, how could it be the cause of the universe?

It is interesting to note that this is the only Upanishad among the major ones to introduce Soul in its discussions. This Soul is obviously not the Spirit or the Ātman which the Upanishads have declared as Brahman. In fact, the main theme of the Upanishads has been that the nature of Brahman resides in the Ātman.. If this be the case, how can it be powerless? And yet, this Upanishad describes Ātmam as *aniśa* or powerless, subject to the influence of pleasure and pain. It is quite evident that the Ātman of this Upanishad is not the same Ātman about which all the Upanishads have declared in such glorious terms. With the introduction of this new term, we have to postulate three entities: Brahman, the Ātman or the Self and the Soul. The Soul—that entity which is *aniśa* or powerless because of being affected by pleasure and pain—is obviously the Ego. The Ego, the Spirit and Brahman—this is the triplicity which arrests our attention as we turn to the teachings of this Upanishad.

What is this Ego or the Soul? It is a compound, an accumulation born out of the process of time. Why is it

affected by pleasure and pain? Because, it is a product of a duality. In its very make-up there is a resistance to pain and the acceptance of pleasure. To be affected by pleasure and pain shows that there are centres of indulgence and denial in its very constitution. It nourishes what it considers as pleasant and it builds up a resistance against what it calls unpleasant or evil. In the Vedāntic classification this Ego has its abode in what is known as the *Kāraṇa Śarīra* —the Causal Body. It is causal only in the sense in which it supplies the material cause. *Upādāna* does not merely mean the physical material—it also means the psychological material. And this is supplied by the psychic entity known as the Ego. The causal body is the storehouse of psychological tendencies—the psychological memory which supplies the psychic material for the creation of mental, emotional and physical manifestations. The Ego is born of duality—it is the product of time. It is the accumulated and the acquired nature of man. How can this be the cause of the universe? It is subjected to the factors that constitute the universe. The students of divine Wisdom have rightly proclaimed this Ego or the Soul as helpless. But then what is the cause of the Universe? After quiet reflection and meditation, they came to the conclusion that:

> It is the Power belonging to the Absolute, hidden within it that must be the cause of the Universe—the Absolute is the one that presides over all those factors, beginning with Time and ending with the Soul.

They argued that the Universe must have come out of the Absolute—for it alone is without limitation. It is affected neither by Time nor by Necessity—nor by other material or psychic elements. The Absolute or the Supreme Being is the Cause—all else is but the effect. The cause is present in the effect—but, so intangibly and imperceptibly, that one misses the cause and regards the effect itself as the cause. If the Cause is in the effect, then can one find it by dissecting the effect? How can the Intangible be found by breaking up the tangible? When cause is not found by dissecting the effect, then does man say

that is the secret which the Upanishad gives to the students of the Divine Wisdom. It says:

> Alone in this universe, He comes and goes,
> It is He who is the fire, the water He pervadeth,
> Him and Him only knowing, I cross over death,
> No other path at all there is to go.

There is no other path at all to go—so declares the Śvetāśvatara Upanishad in unmistakable terms. But which is this Path? It is the Path of knowing Him and Him alone. But He can be known only in the act of complete surrender. A surrender is indeed a total action—there can be no reservation in it. Wherever a man acts totally, without any reservation, there he comes to the experience of this Supreme Being—it does not matter what the field of total action is. This totality of action is verily death. Death does not permit of any reservations—death demands a totality of action. The Supreme Being whom this Upanishad has described as Śiva can be known only in the realm of death. Strangely enough, the experience of death is indeed the experience of love—for love too is a total action. In fact, Love and Death are not two different things—they are the two sides of a medallion. He who knows how to die, knows in that act of dying what supreme love is. Death is a negation—love is the positive experience. But the positive experience of love comes only in the moment of death. In the moment of death one is stripped of everything—one is divested even of oneself—and is this also not the moment of Love? Death is indeed a surrender—but it is only in surrender that the Gift of Love comes. The student of the Divine Wisdom declares:

> I surrender to Him, who is the bridge of Immortality, who is without parts, who is motionless, who is beyond corruption, who is above all attachment—who is like the Flaming Fire that emits no smoke.

The Fire that emits no smoke—this is the description of that Supreme Being to whom one surrenders in the moment of highest knowledge. The next verse in this Upanishad indicates that it is only as man regards space as his only covering that he will come to the realization of the

Supreme Being. To be covered by space alone—this *is* the condition of being divested of everything. To know Space as the only covering is to live under the canopy of heaven. To live in the open, seeking no shelter except the shelter of space—this is the path of spiritual wisdom. Indeed, there is no other path at all to go.

It is very significant that this Upanishad ends with an instruction by Sage Śvetāśvatara to his pupils in which he says that the Esoteric Wisdom of the Upanishad should not be imparted to one who is *Aśānta*, one who is *Aputra* and one who is *Aśishya*. It is not to be given to one who has a restless mind—a mind distracted hither and thither, for, it is a superficial mind feeding itself on sensations and excitements. To such a mind, it is utterly useless to give this Supreme Wisdom. It is like casting pearls before an indiscriminate being. But the Upanishad says that its teaching should not be given to one who is *Aputra*—one who has no son. This indicates a mind that is barren. It signifies a mind that is utterly dry, devoid of deep and passionate interest. Of what use is the teaching to a person who is devoid of feeling? The Upanishad further says that the teaching of the Divine Wisdom should not be given to one who is *aśishya* —One who is not teachable.. *Aśishya* is one whose mind is closed—there is no space in it. Thus the Upanishad says that for the understanding of the great spiritual Wisdom, it is of the highest importance that one should possess a mind that is not fleeting, a mind that is not barren and a mind that is not closed. A fleeting mind is a dull mind, moving only when an external stimulus comes. A barren mind is a frustrated mind for, it is engaged in an effort that can never bear fruit. An unteachable mind is a closed mind—a mind in which there is no room whatsoever. The Wisdom of the Upanishad can be known only by a mind that is alert, a mind that is full of a deep passion and a mind that is completely open —a mind that is thoroughly vulnerable—for it has nothing to defend. It is only the defenceless mind that can know what total surrender is—its surrender has no reservations, it has nothing to keep back, nothing to hide or to protect.